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LECTURES ON THE GOSPELS.

For the Sundays and Chief Festivals

OF THE

CHURCH YEAR.

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PREFACE.

WHATEVER may be said of the practice of habitual preaching on the regular Pericopes of the Church, it cannot be gainsayed, that they ought to be preached on, and that the facts and doctrines contained in them should be faithfully expounded. They are among the richest selections that can possibly be made from the New Testament; they are thorough and comprehensive in their scope; and the sanctified wisdom of ages is embodied in the system in which they have been arranged. The neglect which they have received, in the English pulpits of this country, is without excuse; and the disadvantage of such neglect has been great, to both ministers and people.

The common method of allowing the incidents of the hour, or the mere convenience of the preacher, to assume the high place of deciding what the theme of the sermon shall be, is particularly pernicious, and calls for earnest reform. The Christian pulpit is meant for the presentation of the Gospel only,

and for the sober and careful giving out of the pure Word of God, and it ought never to be attracted or led by the secularities of the moment. There is no better way to break down the distinctive character of the Church, or for insuring a lean and superficial piety, than for ministers to give place to the habit of consulting popular favor, or of conforming the subjects of their discourses to the unevangelic and often miserable topics enlisting the attention of the community around them. It may serve to draw crowds, but the fruit of it is spiritual desolation, compromise of the Gospel, and the bringing of the most sacred things into contempt. And any effort to show "a more excellent way," by which such debauching sensationalism may be avoided, and the minds of men turned more directly and fully to the great truths of our holy religion, in their proper places and principal texts, cannot but be commended by all right-thinking people.

A full series of Discourses on our Pericopes, whether of Gospels or Epistles, has never hitherto been furnished in the English language. This fact alone tells a tale of no agreeable import. It is itself an unfortunate deficiency. It argues an absence of the true spirit of our Church; and it suggests the prevalence of a type of religion which exalts the sensational above the doctrinal, and is more inclined to the sentimental than the didactic. This state of things needs amendment. More attention to the

Church Year, and to the regular Lessons (the assignment of which to the places they occupy dates back, for the most part, to the earliest Christian ages), would be something of a corrective, and exercise a salutary influence. It would certainly be a commendable ambition in all our younger clergy, to make it an object to prepare at least one full set of discourses on these Lessons. The work would be a wholesome discipline for themselves, and add to the spiritual edification of their hearers greatly beyond what could otherwise be attained. It would also save much valuable time often fruitlessly spent in selecting and settling upon texts. It would give a far wider scope to the range of evangelical subjects brought forward for the instruction of the people. It would secure more variety, balance and proportion in the ministrations of the pulpit. And it would advantage much every way. The members of the Church would also do well to ask it of their ministers, not only to read regularly the appointed Lessons for the day, where such is not the custom, but also to explain them, and to preach on them.

The volumes which are here commenced, may not be all that is to be desired. But no one can examine them, or even casually glance through them, without being impressed with the admirable propriety and ampleness of the provision which our Church has made in her Lessons for the full instruction of her membership in all that pertains to Christianity.

Nor will they fail to render important service until something superior shall have been produced. They have been of value to the author in preparing them, and they have done good to those to whom they were preached. They may also help and encourage others to similar efforts. They are, at any rate, as satisfactory as anything the author would have been likely to produce on other texts. And they put it in the power of our English members to refer to a discourse on the proper Lesson for the day, when deprived of the privilege of public worship, or when without the services of a minister to preach to them.

The author has been repeatedly solicited and urged to give more of his sermons to the public for general use and edification. He has also had it particularly laid upon his conscience, by persons who have the interests of the Church deeply at heart, to print a complete series of his discourses on the appointed Lessons of the Church Year. It has been represented to him as an evident call of God upon him, to give out for the advantage of the whole Church what was thought to be of great benefit to his own congregation. Whether wisely or unwisely, he has consented to these requests, and herewith presents these volumes on *The Gospels*. The reader will, of course, judge of them according to contents. As the Lectures were preached, so they are printed. If life and health be spared, and the necessary en-

couragement is afforded, it is the intention of the author to publish a series on *The Epistles* also.

With no vain wish to obtrude himself or his writings where they are not wanted, but in honest desire to serve his Lord and Master, and the Church of which he has been ordained a public teacher, the writer commits to the world these *Lectures on the Gospels*, invoking upon them, and upon all that read them, and upon all men, the favor of God and the grace of His Holy Spirit, that the saving words of the Lord Jesus here dealt with, may ever sound in our Churches, and live in the homes and hearts of our people, even unto the end of the world, to the praise of Him who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high; to Whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory forever. Amen.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

LEC.		PAGE.
I.	Christ's Coming to Jerusalem,	1– 20
II.	The Signs of Christ's Future Coming,	21– 46
III.	John the Baptist's Mission to Jesus,	47– 66
IV.	The Jews' Embassy to John the Baptist,	67– 87
V.	The Saviour's Nativity,	88–102
VI.	Visit of the Shepherds to the Manger,	103–119
VII.	Presentation of Christ in the Temple,	120–134
VIII.	The Circumcision of Christ,	135–149
IX.	The Wise Men from the East,	150–167
X.	Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents,	168–186
XI.	The Saviour's Childhood and Youth,	187–206
XII.	The Marriage and Miracle in Cana,	207–224
XIII.	The Leper and the Centurion,	225–242
XIV.	Christ Stilling the Storm,	243–260
XV.	Parable of the Wheat and Tares,	261–279
XVI.	The Glorious Transfiguration,	280–301
XVII.	Parable of the Vineyard,	302–321
XVIII.	Parable of the Sower,	322–340
XIX.	Christ's Last Journey to Jerusalem,	341–360
XX.	The Temptation,	361–380
XXI.	The Syro-Phœnician Woman,	381–398
XXII.	Healing of the Dumb Demoniac,	399–418
XXIII.	Feeding of the Five Thousand,	419–436
XXIV.	Final Disputation with the Jews,	437–454
XXV.	Last Entry into Jerusalem,	455–469
XXVI.	The Last Supper,	470–482
XXVII.	The Agony in the Garden,	483–495
XXVIII.	The Crucifixion,	496–512
XXIX.	The Resurrection,	513–528
XXX.	The Walk to Emmaus,	529–543
XXXI.	The Convincing Revelation,	544–559
XXXII.	The Good Shepherd,	560–575

GRANT, LORD, to Thy Church, Thine own Spirit, and the wisdom that cometh down from above, that Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course, and be preached to the joy and edifying of Thy people, that in steadfast faith they may serve Thee, and ever abide in the confession of Thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

Lectures on the Gospels.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Matt. 21 : 1–9. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them unto me.

And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

THE greatest events of time, are those which connect with the history of our blessed Saviour. The Church accordingly directs attention to them, each in its season, that, by their continual remembrance, they may be seen in their proper relations, and

have their due effect upon us. She does not follow the course of the sun in her year, but the course of Him "who was, and is, and is to come;" the Sun of Righteousness; the Light of the world. She is not guided in her reckoning by the movements of the planets, or by the ordinary procession of days and weeks and months, but by the movements of Him who is "the bright and Morning Star," whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.

The first object of Christian attention, is Christ himself; and the first lessons of the Church Year are meant to awaken us to a right comprehension and reception of the Christ. The idea is, not to show us our fall and ruin first, lest we should despair; nor yet the assurances of pardon first, lest we should think too lightly of depravity and sin; but to show us the Saviour himself, that we may learn our malady as we learn the remedy, and find our consolation as we discover our misery.

Salvation begins by looking toward Christ, his coming in the flesh, his suffering for our sins, and his future administrations to avenge and glorify his elect. The beginning of the Church Year corresponds to the beginnings of salvation. It is meant to be to us the beginning of a new life, the commencement of a new season of growth, of revival, of holiness, and of enjoyment in the Lord. And as the light of salvation dawned gradually upon the world, and a long period of preparation and anticipation preceded the actual coming of the Christ, so it is arranged in the Church Year,

that these weeks of Advent should work in us an anxious expectancy, and a wakeful preparation, for the full revelation of the Christ, for the complete consummation of his work in our own hearts, and in all that yet remains to be done. Unite with me then in the earnest prayer that Almighty God may vouchsafe to each of us his gracious help, that the incoming of this new Church Year may be to us the incoming of a new spiritual life, bringing back the erring, turning the hearts of the wicked, lifting off the burdens of the sorrowing, and giving blissful success to all the desires of the pure in heart!

In the Gospel appointed for this morning, we have the account of Christ's coming to Jerusalem, and his presentation of himself to the Jewish nation, as its Divine Prince and King. The spirit of the occasion is expressed in the words of the prophet, which are quoted as having there had their fulfilment: "*Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*"

From the earliest ages, there had been a royal Redeemer promised. In the very beginnings of human history, we find hopeful references to his character and his achievements. The first allusion to him was only a general and somewhat veiled announcement,—a mere germ;—but it compassed the entire subsequent history of the universe, as related to the subject of human redemption. It was the golden seed-grain of all the hopeful songs of the prophets, and all the glad

proclamations of the Apostles. It was dim and indefinite, but it served as an anchor for the drifting hopes of mankind, and constituted the Gospel before the flood. "It was the comfort of Adam and Eve when they turned in the fire-guarded gate, from their last look on Eden, to go down into the world where the curse smoked before them. It was the selectest subject of communion when Enoch walked with God, and hallowed the hour of his ascension into heaven. It was the brightest lamp in the ark when it rocked on the waves of an ocean world, beneath a sky that knew no noon or dawn. And when the flood had subsided, and the patriarch from the old world came out upon the misty mountains of the new, and worshipped his Deliverer at the altar which glistened with the hues of the first rainbow, and his household became many families, and these families many tribes, descending from the summits and filling the lowlands, still, dearer to hope than the lost paradise to memory, bloomed around the tents of the holy the promise of a coming Messiah."

When Abraham was called, the assurance was repeated, and promise given, that from him should spring a Seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Jacob, in his day, became the heir of the same blessed promise, which was the joy and glory of his tribes in all their pilgrimages, captivities, trials, and triumphs. The legislation of Moses was intermingled with amplifications and new certifications of the same promise,

and the Law itself was the illustrator of a nobler administration and a better economy, which another Moses was to bring in, and establish on better promises. It was sung about by Balak's unwilling prophet from the rocks of the wilderness. It went over Jordan with the tribes of Israel, and became the chief bond of their national union in Palestine, the boast of their national pride, the badge of their national distinction. It was the master-theme of David's harp which caused the tabernacle, the palace, the temple, all Jerusalem, all Judah, all Israel, to thrill for centuries with its glorious notes. Prophets of God, in the later ages of the Jewish Kingdom, prolonged and increased the strain, and brightened the anticipation. Disaster, tyranny, and servitude, only riveted it more firmly upon the national heart, and turned the captives' eyes with augmented longing for its accomplishment. And by the time the Old Testament canon closed, all Israel was aglow with joyous expectations of the near advent of One who was the Desire of nations, and in whom rested the hopes of all mankind.

Even in those centuries of interval between Malachi and the time to which the text refers, there were many zealous and sublime anticipations expressed, echoing the inspired prophets, and heralding the speedy fulfilment of their words. In the Maccabean period, Baruch sung of the restoration and triumph of the chosen people, through Him whom God was to send. Tobit rehearsed

the same. The Sibylline writings celebrated the coming of a King from God, who should cause every land to cease from evil, and be to Zion an immortal Light. The Seer of the Book of Henoch proclaimed the approach of "the Son of man, to whom righteousness belongeth, and with whom righteousness dwelleth," when "all evil shall vanish and pass away before his face."

Nor was it in the family of Seth, and Shem, and Abraham, and Jacob, and Judah, alone, that this anxious anticipation of a coming King and Redeemer may be traced through the ages. In other families, races, and nations, was the tradition preserved. Its dim but still hopeful coruscations gleamed, even amid the darkness of Gentile apostasy. The expectation of a golden age of deliverance to come, was common among the heathen. Hesiod, and Ovid, and Virgil sung about it; and the latter connected it with the advent of a particular person, after the same manner as the inspired prophets. Socrates talked of a great teacher to come from heaven, who was to be looked and waited for, to give the light necessary for the proper regulation of the world. An impression was abroad upon mankind at the time Christ was born, that Nature was about to bring forth a miraculous King. Far in the remote East, the Magi were looking among the stars for the signal of his birth, and treasuring their gold, frankincense, and myrrh, to be laid at his feet. And in the West, grave Roman historians were taking notice of oracles which told of a power rising

from the eastward,—an outbirth of Judea,—which was to gain the empire of the world.

It was impossible that all this promise, prediction, preparation, and devout anticipation, should fail of ultimate fulfilment. Four thousand years elapsed from the first allusion to the subject before any signs of its accomplishment appeared; but the fulness of the time at length came, and "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4 : 4, 5.

But Messiah did not come as many, in their carnal imaginings, supposed that he would. He came in humility and lowliness. He came as a babe, humbly born. He was about thirty years in the world before people were aware of his presence. Some had a knowledge of his birth, but even the exciting marvels which attended it, left no lasting impression. John the Baptizer awakened a thousand-fold more attention at the time. An obscure village, of bad report, was the Saviour's home. His mother had a quiet carpenter for a husband, and the adorable Christ was known simply as the carpenter's son, himself also a carpenter. When he appeared on Jordan's banks, it was with all the meekness and plainness of a man seeking forgiveness. By signs which then were given, John began to bear witness to his presence, and to point to him as the Lamb of God; but his walk was the least ostentatious on earth. His attendants, even in his most public ministry, were

a few fishermen, tax-gatherers, and women. He awakened some attention by his discourses and his miracles of mercy; yet, in other respects, he was as meek and quiet as the humblest of men. Some took him to be a prophet, and a few had a little deeper insight into his real character; but most men despised him, and put him aside as a demoniac, a worthless man, a friend of publicans and sinners. At the very time that he was teaching, exemplifying, and planting the sublimest principles of his empire, and starting the life-germs of a new creation, few paid any serious regard to him, and many considered him unfit to live. And when he made his final visit to Jerusalem, and presented himself to his own chosen people as their Divine Lord and King, though a little enthusiasm was excited, and a vague acknowledgment greeted him from some quarters, and a temporary commotion stirred through the streets and dwellings of Jerusalem, and a transient pause of inquiry and wonder occurred, very few at all comprehended him, whilst the officials and leaders of the people only cried him down, and sought to put him out of the way. He was arrested, tried, and condemned as a disturber of the peace and a blasphemer. He was scourged, mocked, buffeted, spit upon; and finally, while yet in his young manhood, he was dragged to execution, crucified, and killed. "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*" John 1 : 11.

An amount of gladness and of sadness com-

mingles in this history which is inexpressible. We thus behold at once all the hopes of faith fulfilled, and all the untold blessedness which that fulfilment brought, mistaken and missed.

But the same that then occurred, has been repeating itself in all the ages since. As Christ came, and offered himself and his salvation to the Jews, so he also comes to all to whom his Gospel is preached. By his word and Spirit he is ever coming, and ever presenting himself to men as the King and Saviour of the world. In this new Advent time especially, and in the sacred lessons and contemplations which go along with it, the message rings afresh, and addresses itself to each of us: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" Little as men make of the Gospel, and contemptuously as they regard the preaching of it, it is really a coming of the Christ to those who hear it,—the great Redeemer of the world proposing himself as our Lord and King,—the Son of God offering to deliver us from our oppressors, renew our souls, and save us forever. He comes to work in us the new creation, to make us citizens of his divine empire, to establish in and over us the reign of righteousness and peace, and to put us in the way of a deliverance in which no foes shall oppress us any more. And that minister fails to fulfil his office, who fails to tell and assure those to whom he preaches that the King of glory comes to them, as the word of his salvation is proclaimed to them. Christ is in his word; and everywhere and always he is the heart and substance of his

Gospel; and whithersoever that Gospel comes, he comes, and the prophet's words apply: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!*" Yea, O man, O woman, whosoever thou art, the message is to thee—a message of thrilling joy and gladness: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee*"—even "*unto* THEE." He cometh in every Gospel-lesson framed to awaken thee from thy drowsiness and sins. He cometh in this new year of the Church, and season of gracious mercy to thy soul. He cometh to do for thee all, and even higher things, than he proposed to do for ancient Israel. There is not a blessing which he brought to their doors, but he brings it likewise to thine. He comes to make of thee a disciple of his, a member of his household, a servant in his palace, a priest, a king, a sharer in his own royalty and throne forever! And if Capernaum and Bethsaida were exalted to heaven by the presence of the Saviour in their streets, not less is thy exaltation this hour, for the Saviour cometh also to thee!

Nor is man's behavior toward the offered Christ now, different from what it was in the days of his flesh. Some recognize him, and some do not. Some believe in him, and follow him as their chief joy; and some sneer at him, revile him, and decline all fellowship with him. Some hail him with Hosanna; and some cry, Away with him. Some accept him as their King and Lord, and cheerfully do his bidding, and others refuse to know any king but Cæsar. Some, who profess to be his friends, betray him for a price, and

crowds, boisterous in his favor to-day, are clamorous against him to-morrow. Whilst some weep and plead for him, others smite him, spit upon him, and put him to an open shame. And, even among those who are known as his followers, there are often doubting ones, discontented with their choice, who sadly fail when the hour of trial comes. The very Peters sometimes are afraid to own him, and stand aloof in the darkness, gazing after him in mere perplexity of wonder. He still comes to his own, and his own receive him not.

How, then, my brethren, are we conducting ourselves with reference to him. If it is the truth that he is now again coming to us, as our Lord and King, should it not be the chief inquiry of our souls how to fulfil the prophetic admonition of the text?

O how shall I receive Thee,
How greet Thee, Lord, aright?

1. Careful and devout attention is demanded. God himself lifts up his finger and gives the command: "*Behold.*" When the Saviour came to the Jews, no evidences were lacking to prove who and what he was; but the people neglected that emphatic word, "*Behold.*" They did not give the proper heed. Had they marked well all that the prophets had said, they could not have made the mistake they did. But they were inattentive, and they murdered their own Messiah. And people fail of salvation now from precisely the same cause.

It is a noteworthy truth, that everything great and blessed in human attainment depends upon *attention*. Talent is only the power and fruit of it. Sir Isaac Newton used to say, that the superior genius which men ascribed to him, was simply his concentrated and persevering attention. Let the differences between our natural capacities be what they may, it is very certain, that patient industry and close application will do more for an ordinary mind than all the powers of genius can supply without them. And what is true of attainments in general, is specially true in the things of salvation. It will not answer to rest on our own vague prepossessions, or to substitute our carnal and outside judgments for the results of a devout and earnest searching for the truth. "Attend unto my words," saith the Lord. "Incline your ear unto me, and hear; and your soul shall live." And if we would know Christ, we must give ear to him, and hear what the Scriptures say of Him, and "give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." There is no difficulty in reaching the truth, if we are in earnest to find it. "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words," admonishing the simple, reproving the scornful, and publishing the counsel of the Lord. Let the ears of men be open, let their hearts be attentive, let them listen, and search, and pray, with an

anxious readiness to learn, accept, and obey the truth, and the way is prepared, and they will not fail to find their true Saviour. And one great aim of this Advent season is, to send us afresh to our Bibles, to our closets, to serious thinking over sacred things, and above all to earnest contemplation of the claims of Christ, and what he proposes to be to us. This we must be willing to do, or Christ will come and go again, and we be none the wiser or the better for it.

2. We must take the Saviour God sends us, and not wait for one after our own mind. The Jews wanted, for their Messiah, a glorious hero, clothed with pomp and showy power,—one to marshal armies, and to lead his people through battles to victory—an earthly sovereign, to multiply to them earthly glories, and build up for them the splendors of an earthly empire. Hence their offence at the lowliness of Jesus. His humility did not accord with their carnal ideas of the promised Son of David. He was not such a Saviour as they liked. He was not the Messiah they desired. Their selfish fancies were not realized in his character and method; and therefore they refused him. The same is also, to this day, keeping many from salvation. They have their own preconceived ideas and false notions, and, because things do not square with these, they hesitate, and fail to receive the Christ. They are looking for experiences, for certain overwhelming demonstrations, for some particular impulses

and ecstasies of feeling, for some transporting seizure which they cannot themselves explain, and, not finding this, they excuse themselves, and wait, and let Christ and salvation go. What they need is, to cast these ideal pictures to the winds, to quit this prescribing to God, or to themselves, what sort of a Saviour they are to have, or how he is to come. We must be willing to accept the Christ God sends us, and take him as he sees fit to come, and put, not Him, but our vain and unfounded fancies, from us. If we cannot feel, and see, and pray, and realize things as we would like, that will never answer to justify us in neglect of duty, nor serve as an excuse for not closing with the offers of salvation. No, my friend, let thy conceits go to the dogs. It is thy King that cometh to thee; and it is thy business to receive, acknowledge, and follow him, with a grateful and obedient heart, without waiting till thy selfish and carnal imaginings are met. Receive thy King as best thou canst, and leave the rest to Him.

3. We must be cautious to guard our hearts against the offence of the cross. Our King comes to us "meek," and in a way to humble our pride. It was at this especially the Jews stumbled. This idea of being great by humility, of triumphing by forbearing, of ascending by condescension, of gaining all things by renouncing all things,—this living for heaven only, this sacrificing of pleasure and self for the sake of the kingdom, this abandonment of all style and state on earth to reign

in spiritual strength and glory, this laying aside of all earthly ambition for citizenship in an invisible empire, this finding of blessedness in suffering and reproach,—these they could not brook; and rather than be compelled to submit to them, they rejected and crucified Him who came with a kingdom of which these were elements. And the same trouble and danger obtain still. People would readily become Christians, if they could do so by holding fast to their carnal loves and principles. If the maxims, fashions, pleasures and glories of the world had not to be resigned; if the Divine kingdom would only harmonize with what the natural heart most relishes and enjoys; if they could only be permitted to have their own ways of thinking gratified; the great stumbling-block would at once be out of the way. But they are loth to submit to such strictures and stringencies, and to such stern and offensive violations of the ways in which their feelings run. How can they take a king so mortifying to their tastes? How can they pronounce so harshly upon their good easy way of living! How can they come down to that base level on which all men are alike simple and undeserving! How can they regard all their goodness and glory as nothing before God, and begin their learning and their lives over again, like little children! What a miserable exchange they think it, to let go the dance for the communion table, the opera for the dulness of the sanctuary, the delights and pleasures of the gay world for the drudgery and insipidity of humble

Christian duty, charity, and the scrupulousness of a devout and godly life! They are not anxious to be the servants of the devil; heaven they would like to obtain; and the virtues of Christianity are not unlovely in their eyes; but to go through the mortification of a complete surrender to all the requirements, and to shut themselves off suddenly and forever from so many things which they find agreeable, pleasant, and suited to their tastes, they cannot find it in their hearts to do. It is too hard for them; the cross is too heavy; the demands are too severe; they are not prepared for so complete a revolution of the whole course of their lives; and so Christ is dismissed, and salvation is not accepted. But the words of the Saviour, on this point, are plain and unmistakable: "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Matt. 10: 38. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matt. 16: 24. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Luke 14: 27. "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Mark 8: 38. If we are not willing to sacrifice our worldliness, we must sacrifice our salvation; for Christ will not divide his empire with mammon.

4. And especially are we to be on our guard

against rejecting the true Christ for one who will never come. The Jews did not intend to reject the Messiah, when they rejected Jesus of Nazareth. They still were strong and confident in the hope that a glorious deliverer was promised, and that their whole salvation depended upon him. The only difficulty was, that they did not believe that Jesus was He; and so they murdered the true Christ, in hope of another, who existed only in their own fancy. At the time that judgment came upon them for their sins, they still clung to the delusion that their Messiah must come to their help; and to this day they are still waiting for Him. And multitudes, who are not Jews, are making the same fatal error, rejecting the true Saviour for one who will never come. Christ comes and offers himself, with all the glories of his kingdom to them; but they have an idea that there is salvation for them in some other way—that it is time enough yet—that God is merciful and gracious—that this idea of being eternally punished for such little things in this world, is after all questionable—that we were made to enjoy ourselves, and will not be held to such rigorous account for indulging the feelings which belong to us as human beings—that if Christ has really died for our sins we will be saved any how,—and so put aside the true Christ for one who will never come. O man, be not deceived with such wicked folly! Though the old Jews firmly believed that they had a Messiah in whom they might safely confide, that Messiah never came. They were abandoned to their

enemies. The judgments of heaven broke upon them with a severity unparalleled in the annals of time. Their people were put to the sword. Their temple was burned. Their holy city was ploughed as an heap. Its people, called to be kings, were given to be slaves. Their whole economy, planned as it was of God himself, was completely destroyed. Their land, flowing with milk and honey, was turned into pestilential desolation. And now, for these eighteen hundred years, their children have been without a home among the nations—the very Cain of peoples—the vagabond tribes of the earth, whom the mass of mankind are unwilling to trust, favor, or respect. And no better shall men fare now, who put aside the true Christ for some other hope. There is but one Christ; and Jesus is the Christ forever. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4 : 12. This Christ comes to thee now; and there is a last time in which He will thus come to thee; and if thou puttest Him from thee, either for another, or for another time, there is danger that it may prove to thee a throwing up of thy salvation forever. Think how Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and said: "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes." Luke 19 : 41, 42. And as thou lookest upon those tears, and hearest those words of calamity, fear, and be on thy guard, lest it should also be so with thee

The greatest results may come of little prejudices and mistakes, even where the intentions are not evil. The Jewish rejection of Christ involved no astounding violations of the common principles on which men act. They merely followed their feelings and prejudgments in the case. From their point of view, it was quite natural for them to act as they did. They thought they understood the matter. They were willing to take the responsibility. The Saviour himself declared that they knew not what they did. They thought their course a safe one. They were persuaded by their feelings and perverted reasonings, not meaning to incur the dreadful guilt which their conduct sealed upon them. Yet, that little error in the style of their thinking, that little selfish bigotry and carnal prejudice in their hearts, sealed their doom, and entailed eighteen centuries of desolation and sorrow upon their race!

Know then, my hearers, how important it is to deal fairly with this solemn subject. Jesus is coming to you again. The voice of prophets and apostles is ringing in your ears: Behold, your king cometh unto you! The command of the Almighty to his servants is, to "tell the daughter of Zion" the glorious fact. And by the authority of Him to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, I publish and declare to each of you: "BEHOLD, THY KING COMETH UNTO THEE."

How, then, are you affected by the glad tidings? Are you prepared to receive him? Are you willing and ready to start this new year of the Church

with a new life of obedience to your rightful and saving Lord? Have you your heart's consent to let go your earthiness and sins, to live in the peace and hope of Christ's imperishable kingdom? O let not these gracious visitations pass unimproved. Jesus is ready, anxious, waiting to be your Prince and Saviour. Will you again say no, and risk the judgment which overhangs the rejecters of the Christ? Bethink you rather, review your ground, and let this be your song and prayer:

O kindle, Lord most holy,
  Thy lamp within my breast,
To do in spirit lowly
  All that may please Thee best.

Thy Zion palms is strewing,
  And branches fresh and fair;
My heart its powers renewing,
  An anthem shall prepare.
My soul puts off her sadness,
  Thy glories to proclaim;
With all her strength and gladness
  She fain would serve Thy name.

I lay in fetters groaning,
  Thou comest to set me free!
I stood, my shame bemoaning,
  Thou comest to honor me!
A glory thou dost give me,
  A treasure safe on high,
Thou wilt not fail nor leave me
  As earthly riches fly.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Luke 21 : 25–36. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth.

Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

THERE are several aspects, or points of view, in which we may contemplate the coming of Christ. In the Old Testament, all was generally combined in one conception; but fuller light has rendered it easy to distinguish differences. He came when he was born into our world at Bethlehem, and performed the pilgrimage of a human life, which

ended with his crucifixion on Calvary. He came again when he rose from among the dead, reappeared among men, had himself proclaimed to the world as the ever-living Saviour, and sent forth the ministers of his word and sacraments, with those various gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, by means of which the hearers of his Gospel obtain power to become the sons of God. In this sense, he is perpetually coming to and through his Church, offering himself to the reception, faith, and obedience of men, as their gracious and all-sufficient Lord and Saviour. In this sense, he comes in every faithful sermon, in every fresh advent time, and in every offer of grace through his word and sacraments. In this sense, he comes to us with every new day of our lives, yea, every hour, with presentations of his mercy, that we may grow in faith and knowledge of him, embrace him to the greater comfort and peace of our souls, and become ever more and more filled with his Spirit, and with the power of his salvation. But he is also to come again in more manifest glory and power, to give everlasting redemption to his people, to make an end of all their disabilities and distresses, and to mete out to his enemies and theirs the just deserts of all their wickednesses.

This coming is not at death. Death is nowhere called the coming of Christ. It may be the going of the saints to him, but it is not his coming to them, in any such sense as that in which we declare in the Creed: "*He shall come to judge the*

quick and the dead." Though, in some sense, always present, there are respects in which he is quite absent, in which he has been absent since the day of his ascension from the Mount of Olives, and in which he will continue to be absent until mankind "shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory." Having "ascended up far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named," he "sat down on the right hand of God." We therefore say in the Creed, that he now "sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Personally, locally, and in the way of visible manifestation, he is in heaven. And in that same sense in which he is now absent from the earth, he is again to come to the earth, when "every eye shall see him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."

It is this literal return of the blessed Saviour, as the Son of man,—his visible coming "in the glory of the Father and of his holy angels,"—his sublime manifestation at the ending of this present world,—that is referred to in this morning's Gospel.

I. Let us, therefore, in the first place, assure ourselves of the scripturalness and orthodoxy of the doctrine, that the glorious Lord Jesus Christ is really and literally to return again in person to our world. This is the more important, as the tendencies are to neglect and explain away this article of the faith. There is not another topic

of Christianity, of equal significance, which men generally regard with so much skeptical indifference. Even piously-disposed and conscientious people, who are zealous for every "thus saith the Lord," are often very oblivious, dull, and doubtful with reference to this part of the teachings of Holy Scripture. Admitting it as in some sort a part of the proper creed of the Church, they still do not take it in with that practical interest which belongs to it, and which they show toward other great doctrines. If they believe it at all, it is with such dim remoteness, and such cold indefiniteness, that it can hardly be said to be a part of their real faith. It is in their Creed, but more as a mute letter than as a living power. What the Church needs on this subject is a revival of that earnest old faith, whose addresses to the churches were prefaced and pervaded with the all-quickening "Behold! he cometh!"—which implored the Saviour, "Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming?"—and whose deep and undying prayer is, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

That our Saviour is to return again to the earth, as literally and truly as he went up out of it, is certainly the teaching of the New Testament. The passages on this point are so numerous and explicit, that it is a wonder how any who receive the Scriptures as their guide, should ever let it drop from their most fervent belief. When Jesus was about to leave the world, he said, "I go to

prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again* and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14 : 3. At the time of his ascension, the angels said to his astonished disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*" Acts 1 : 11. Peter, in his first discourses after Christ's departure, assured the people that God "*shall send Jesus Christ*, whom the heavens must receive [retain] until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3 : 20, 21. Paul assured the sorrowing Thessalonians that "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4 : 16, 17. And so in the very last words which John gives us from the Saviour's lips, as the volume of inspiration closed, we have the assurance from heaven itself, "He which testifieth these things saith, *Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*" Rev. 22 : 20.

It was, accordingly, a vital and characteristic part of the faith and hope of the early Christians, to look forward to, and to expect, the coming again

of the Lord Jesus. The whole Christian experience of the Thessalonians was, that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, *and to wait for his Son from heaven.*" 1 Thess. 1 : 9, 10. Paul, speaking in the name of the Christians of his time, said, "Our conversation is in heaven; *from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. 3 : 20, 21. After the same manner, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews remarks, "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and *unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time* without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9 : 27, 28. And so in all the apostolic addresses, there is nothing enjoined upon Christians, or mankind in general, whether it be repentance, taking up testimony for Christ, holymindedness, forbearance and moderation, mortification of the flesh, faithfulness, soberness, patience, godly living, carefulness, fraternal affection, or the dutifulness of ministers, which is not connected with, and urged with specific reference to, the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the whole success of redemption itself is conditioned upon the return of our Lord, to carry forward to its final consummation that of which we now have merely the foundations; for it is only as the "things" connected

with the second coming "begin to come to pass," that the Saviour exhorts his people to lift up their heads, and to believe that their "redemption draweth nigh."

Hence, also, all the recognized creeds of the Church, from the earliest Christian ages to the present, assert it as one of the first principles of the oracles of God, concerning which no believer is to doubt, that our blessed Lord and Saviour is to come again personally to the earth. Those were great foundation facts to which the Apostles testified, when they declared that he rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. But, by the side of these, and as of equal importance, the first recorded Christian creed places this further article: "*From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*" Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, further enlarges upon what was the common Christian belief, where he speaks of "the ascension of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, *and his coming again* in the glory of his Father, to gather together, in one, all things." The expressions of the faith given by Tertullian, Lucian of Antioch, and Cyril of Jerusalem, assign the same high place to the same article of the coming again of the Lord. The great Council of Nice affirmed it to be the orthodox and universal faith of the Church, that "*He shall come again with glory.*" Even Pelagius did not venture to omit from his faulty creed that Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living

and the dead. The Athanasian Creed declares that the God-man "sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, *whence he shall come* to judge the living and the dead, at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;" and that "this is the true Christian faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." For many ages has the Church been singing the *Te Deum Laudamus*, saying to the glorified Son of God, "We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge." The oldest and most important of Christian liturgies, which is referred to St. James himself, in the prayer of consecration, speaks of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and of "*his glorious and terrible second appearing, when he shall come in glory* to judge the quick and the dead," as being alike fundamental to the true faith. Our own Augsburg Confession affirms, that "*Christ shall openly come again to judge them that are found alive, and restore to life those that be dead, according to the Creed of the Apostles.*" It is written in the Confession of Belgia, "We do believe, out of the Word of God, that *our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again from heaven, and that after a corporal and visible manner, as heretofore he hath ascended*, being adorned with great glory and majesty, that he may appear as judge of quick and dead." And in the entire circle of essential Christian truths, there is not another upon which there has been a more complete, universal, and thorough agreement by all churches, ancient and modern, oriental and western, Catholic and Protestant, or that is more fully

brought out in all the liturgies, hymns, creeds, prayers, and sacred songs, than this of the personal and visible return of the ascended and glorified Redeemer. It is the logical and necessary sequence of the facts on which Christianity is built, and of the whole science of redemption;—the great act now made inevitable to the conclusion of the tragedy of the Incarnation of Deity;—the top-stone, without which the temple of God's glorious grace must needs lie unfinished forever. To strike it out, would confound the whole system of salvation, carry utter confusion into all attempts intelligently to believe or defend the Gospel as of God, and dry up the heartiest and hopefullest springs of faith, holiness, and Christian life. And if Christianity is competent to teach us anything by which its pretensions can at all be vindicated, it does teach, and requires of us to believe with all our heart and soul, that the same Jesus, who was born at Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and received to heaven from Olivet, shall come again, to be seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, as he was seen and heard in the day that he was taken up. If this be not true, there is no truth in Christianity, no substance in our hopes, no inspiration in the Bible.

II. With this point settled, let us look next at *the signs* which the Saviour specified as the heralds of his second coming. These are given with great particularity in the text before us. Luther distinguished them into two leading classes; and

we may safely follow him in this, as also in his exposition of the words which describe them.

First. He finds in the text a divine prediction of an ever-growing earthiness, sensuality, and unbelief, on the part of the great mass of men, as the day of judgment draws near. There is to be no millennium of universal righteousness, liberty, and peace, before Christ comes; but "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." 2 Tim. 3 : 13. In the 34th and 35th verses, Jesus says: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares; for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." "From these words," says Luther, "it is clear, that men shall give themselves to gluttony, inordinate drinking, and general worldliness,—that in all places they shall be so engrossed and steeped in these things as to be no more awake to what is about to transpire than if that day were never so far off; for where there is no feeling of security, and no heedlessness, that day cannot overtake with such unexpected suddenness. In that he says, it shall come as a snare, by which birds or beasts are caught just when most earnest in pursuit of food, and least aware of the presence of the fatal cord, he gives us amply to understand, that the world shall carouse, eat and drink, build and plant, and have the whole heart set on earthly good, and look upon the day of judgment as yet

a thousand years off and more, and so be hurried, in the twinkling of an eye, to the fearful judgment bar of God.

"To the same effect is Luke 17 : 24, 'For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of man be in his day.' Behold here, also, that that day shall come upon all the world with the utmost suddenness. The same further appears in what follows in verses 26–29: 'And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, also, as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.' These words abundantly show how self-secure the people shall be, and how they will be immersed in the cares of the present life, refusing to believe that the day has come. The Apostles, also, have prophesied of this self-security of men as the day of judgment approaches. St. Paul (1 Thess. 5: 2, 3) says, 'The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them.' Now, we know full well that a thief never comes

but when one is most confident, and least expecting him. And (2 Peter, 3 : 3, 4, 10) we read: 'There shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation; but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise,' &c. Who are they that thus walk after their own lusts, but those who will obey neither God nor man, but seek to bind all men to be themselves free to live and do as they like? These are they who ask, 'Where is his coming? Dost thou believe the judgment to be near? Indeed! things will nevertheless continue as they have been.'

"We read, also, in the history of Jerusalem's destruction, that many signs were wrought, and that they were not believed to be tokens of the end until judgment was executed; and so, from the beginning of the world, has it ever been, that the unbelieving would not believe the day of their calamity to be so near as it was, until it was accomplished upon them. Thus, also, it is in this case; people are putting off the day of judgment for yet a thousand years, when another night may bring it. This is the first class of signs presaging the nearness of the day of God."

The second class is given with equal distinctness, and embraces many wonders in nature, so imposing as to challenge universal observation.

"*There shall be signs in the sun.*" There are those who regard this, and what follows, as belonging to the mere poetry of prophecy, and interpret what is said of the sun, moon, stars, sea, and powers of the heavens, as if only governments, rulers, and masses of people, in the state and in the church, were referred to. But this allegorical system meets with no favor at Luther's hands, and should be cast aside by all who wish to settle themselves in a true knowledge of God's word on this solemn subject. It is much safer to keep to the plain letter of the record, and believe with Luther, that "the sign to be given in the sun is, that it will lose its brightness, after the style of what has oft occurred, as Matt. 24 : 29 says: 'The sun shall be darkened.' It is the opinion of some that the sun is to be so darkened as never to shine again; but this cannot be the meaning, for day and night must continue unto the end, as God foretells in Gen. 8 : 22, where he says: 'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.' This sign must therefore be accomplished without hindrance to the succession of day or night; and it must occur before the judgment day, for the reason that it is a token of its nearness and coming. It cannot, therefore, be more than a darkening of the sun in its accustomed course." It may refer to some natural eclipses, or to some extraordinary darkening of that glorious luminary, which, whether science can account for it or not, is still God's own

predicted token of the coming of the day of judgment. The rainbow is a purely natural phenomenon, and may have been before the flood as well as after it; and yet it has been the token and symbol of the Divine promise to preserve and perpetuate the earth, for all the ages since Noah came out of the ark. The naturalness of the thing can be no argument against its acceptance as a foretoken of the impendency of the Saviour's coming. There may have been many eclipses and remarkable obscurations of the sun since Christ left the world; but that does not alter the fact that every new occurrence of the sort is a further fulfilment of the Saviour's words, and a fresh reminder to expect his speedy return.

A very extraordinary darkening of the sun occurred on the 19th day of May, 1780. It was remarked throughout a large portion of New England. The witnesses of it have described it as supernatural and unaccountable. It was not an ordinary eclipse, for the moon was nearly at the full. It was not owing to a clouded condition of the atmosphere, for the stars were visible. Yet it was so dark, from nine o'clock in the morning throughout the usual hours of sunshine, that work had to be suspended, houses had to be lit with candles, the beasts and fowls went to their rest as in the night-time, and though the sun was visible, it had the appearance of being shorn of all its power of illumination. Other instances of like character have occurred in other sections Whether they exhaust the prophecy, is not for us

to say, but they certainly belong to the fulfilment of it.

"*And in the moon.*" This sign is given in Matt. 24 : 29, to the effect that "the moon shall not give her light." Her effulgence was to be taken from her in token of the approach of the day of judgment. And such a marvellous holding back of the light of the moon followed on the night after the notable darkening of the sun to which I have just referred. Though but a day after her full, the darkness of that night is spoken of as probably the most intense ever observed since light was created. I would not lay stress on these things as unmistakably the signs referred to by our Saviour, but I adduce them to show that such things have occurred, and as in the direct line of those signs, from which we are to be admonished that his coming is near.

"*And in the stars.*" According to Matt. 24 : 29, "the stars shall fall from heaven;" by which we are to understand some aerial phenomenon, which is best described as the falling of the stars. Star-showers have also more than once occurred since the Saviour uttered this prediction. They have moreover been more frequent, and more grand in extent, since the time of the Reformation, than in fifteen centuries before. Men of science have particularly investigated their history, and given us lists and descriptions of them. Two such lists have fallen into my hands. For the first fifteen hundred years of our era, the one notes *three*, and the other *seven*, such showers; and for the last

three hundred and sixty-seven years, the one list gives *ten*, and the other *thirteen*, and nine of them since the commencement of the present century. The most wonderful on record, is that which occurred on the 14th of November, 1833, which was witnessed by many who are now listening to my statements. During the three hours of its pendency, hundreds and thousands of people, of all classes, were overwhelmed with terror, and filled with the belief that the day of judgment was about to open. Nor did they mistake the meaning of the phenomenon, though a little beforehand as to the promptness with which the glorious revelation of the Lord Jesus was to follow. It was a sign of the coming judgment, and a solemn token of its nearness, as also those displays of like character which have taken place within the last few months. It will not answer to say that these meteoric showers were not literally the falling of the stars. Science itself has been unable to find for them a more descriptive name than this which the Saviour has given them. They are known in the books as falling stars. Nor will it change the matter to say that they can be accounted for on natural principles, and that they are produced by the laws which govern the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. Luther well says, "The Gospel, which is the word and wisdom of God, pronounces the falling of the stars a sign; and there let the matter rest. Wherefore, if the stars fall, or the sun and moon fail to give their light, be assured that these are harbingers of the

great day of the Lord; for the Gospel cannot utter falsehood."

"*And upon the earth distress* [συνοχη, *anxiety*] *of nations in perplexity.*" This turns our attention to the political fabrics of the world, and to entanglements, disturbances and distresses in the social affairs of mankind, threatening disasters from which there appears no way of escape. In these are included "wars and rumors of wars," revolutions, upheavals in the bosom of society, and the breaking loose of peoples from the restraints of law and order, begetting confusion, trouble, uncertainty, and every unmanageable evil. Such things have been. We can trace them in every age, and in almost every section of the world. But they have increased beyond measure in these last years. A secure government does not at this moment exist upon earth. Political necessities have outgrown the wisdom of human legislators, statesmen, and rulers. Popular outbursts, lawlessness, disregard of the old compacts and principles which held society together, and every form of revolutionary and ungovernable passion and extravagance are at work, filling the nations with painful anxiety, and the whole world with distressful uncertainty. The masses may pay but little attention to it, but thinking men see it, and feel it, and are full of anxious perplexity with reference to it. And before us is the word of the Master himself, telling us what it means. It is one of his own predicted signs of the nearness of his coming.

"*The sea and the waves roaring.*" The gathered waters also testify to the approach of Him who made them. The literal truth of this is no more impossible or improbable than the darkening of the sun and moon, or the falling of the stars. "Earthquakes in divers places," and internal disturbances in the structure of the world, are foretold; and, along with them, naturally follow strange agitations and detonations in the sea. A little more than a year ago we had accounts of the casting up of a volcanic island in the Grecian Archipelago, which set the sea into "a great tumult, like a boiling cauldron," and caused a roaring of terrible fierceness. Similar manifestations from volcanic causes have occurred at other places, and with a frequency within the present century unknown before. Luther says, "It is not to be supposed that all waters, streams, lakes, seas, oceans, shall at the same time, and in like manner, rush and roar with tempestuous agitation. Some seas are thus to be moved, and this is to be the sign to us. And however many times such signals have been given in other days, they shall nevertheless become more numerous and terrible as the day of doom approaches."

"*Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.*" It was the remark of Oosterzee in his commentary on this chapter, that, "As in the animal world, important alterations in the atmosphere are instinctively perceived, as often an inexplicable presentiment of a terrible calamity, whose breaking

in is feared, makes even the most courageous pale with terror; so does our Lord give us to expect that an obscure presentiment of great events shortly before his Parousia will weigh like heavy Alps on many a heart." Yet, as Luther says, "This shall be realized, not so much by the profligate mass, who disregard God's tokens, and refer everything to natural causes, but in the case of the better class, and the most distinguished, whose hearts these things affect, and who are given to reflection. And this fainting or falling means, that they shall be frightened to death, or the next thing to death; and that their trepidation shall consume them, and wring out of them all strength and hopefulness." A more minute account of this particular is given in Rev. 6 : 15–17, where John "beheld, . . . and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Prelibations of this occur before the last great catastrophe, and every instance of the sort is a prognostic to the world that the coming of the Lord draweth near.

"*For the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*" As Stier surmises, "The sustaining and working forces of the heavenly system, with their influences

for the earth, shall be disturbed, and give intimation as if about to fall to pieces." The seasons shall become eccentric; the atmosphere shall be infected, and broken loose from its common order; and the natural government of things shall be weakened and disordered, in correspondence with the disturbed condition of human society. Yet we must not connect with these things the idea of a universal collapse. As Luther remarks, "Not all the hosts or powers of heaven shall be moved, but some of them only; for not all stars shall fall from their places, nor shall all men be overcome with fear, nor all waters at the same time be in noisy commotion, nor sun and moon be every day darkened; for these are to be but signs, which can only occur at particular times, and in a few places, that they may be something special, and singled out as tokens to the great mass, who are unwilling so to regard them."

"AND THEN SHALL THEY SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY."

III. Finally, let us glance at the sort of affections which the occurrence of these signs of the Saviour's coming should beget and nurture in our souls.

To most people, the doctrine of the near coming of Christ is only a terror and an annoyance. They do not wish to think of it. They would rather not hear about it. If they could have their own way, they would prefer that Christ might never come. The young mother looks upon her child,

and would like that day at least postponed until she can see him a man, and settled in the world. The statesman, who has spent his years elaborating systems of reform, is offended with the idea that this present order of things may close before his schemes are tried. The politician in his zeal for his country, because being enriched by his country's favors, cannot endure to think that his patriotic devotion is likely soon to be needed no more. And the self-seeking preacher, the hypocritical professor, the Pharisaic humanitarian, is particularly sensitive to the dangerous fanaticism of those who venture to read aloud God's word with reference to the signs of the Saviour's coming, or undertake to compare them with the actual state of things around us. And all who live as if this world were man's highest portion, and spend their energies in pursuit of its pleasures, honors, and possessions, cannot for a moment anticipate Christ's speedy coming without the deepest deprecations. Luther well read the human heart, when he said, "There be very few who would not rather that the day of judgment might never come."

But this is not the way in which our Saviour would have us affected by this subject. It is indeed a terrible thing for the guilty, and is meant so to be, that it may break up their false security, and arouse them to repentance and a better life; but it is designed to be a joy and consolation to all true believers. It is intended to be a thing of precious promise and of glad hope to them. Yea,

and with all the terribleness with which it is to be attended, with all the fears of the timid and fainthearted, with all the petulance and impatience with which it is viewed by the sensual and the worldly, and with all the alarm which it has for the unsanctified and the guilty, the day of Christ's coming is really a joyful day, a desirable day, a blessed day,—which every member of Christ may well wish to come as speedily as possible. And so the Saviour describes it in this day's Gospel. "When these things begin to come to pass," he does not propose to us to become alarmed, nor tell us to tremble and be afraid, nor admonish us to be dismayed as if some terrible calamity were about to befall us; but he commands us to "look up," and lift up our heads, in peaceful anticipation, and in glad longing for the speedy accomplishment of all that has been foretold. All alarming fears he would have us lay aside, and joyfully believe that it is our redemption that is approaching.

It is, indeed, a solemn and startling thought even for good people to entertain, that we have come to, and are daily treading on, the very margin of the day of judgment. Yet there is reason to believe that it is the truth. Luther, in his day, maintained that all the predicted signs had already appeared; and they have been tenfold intensified since his day. There is nothing now that we can see that remains to be fulfilled before the predicted coming of our Lord. All the dates, by the best light the Church now has, are in their

last years. The increase of knowledge, inventions, enterprise, revolution, earthiness, unbelief, apostasy, scoffing, surfeiting, and running to and fro, with the signs in sun, moon, and stars, foretold by prophets, apostles, and Christ himself, as bordering on the end, has taken place. Men of learning, piety, and soberness of mind, in all sections of the world, are giving it out as their profound conviction that the time has about come, and that any of these days or nights the judgment scenes may be upon us. And cold and dead must be the heart that can realize the idea without being thrilled through and through. But still, whilst it should kindle every spiritual energy into flame, and beget in us the most devout watchfulness, there is nothing in it to cause dismay to the true Christian. Have we not had enough of the aches, and ills, and losses, and bereavements, and death scenes, and funerals, and graves, and battles with sin, error, and death, which are our inheritance in this present world? Have we not seen enough of the curse, experienced enough of it, to wish to feel now the glory of deliverance,—to desire to look upon the earth once in its Sabbath dress—to be anxious to see these thunder-riven hills transformed with Edenic beauty, and this long down-trodden creation relieved forever of all its groans and miseries? What is it that Jesus has bid us pray for when he teaches us to say: "*Thy kingdom come; . . . Deliver us from evil?*" What, but the interference of his own Almightiness to lift us out of this state of conflict, imperfection, sor-

row and trial? And "when these things begin to come to pass," shall we suddenly alter our petitions, and say: "*Let* NOT *thy kingdom come!*" or, "*Let it not come* YET!" What is the day of judgment but the day of the coming of the kingdom? Doth not the Saviour say, "When these things," these foregoing signs, "begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh;" that we should know, when we see these things come to pass, "that *the kingdom of God is nigh at hand?*" How, also, did St. Paul view that day? Have we not his words to show us in what manner we should contemplate it? "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. 4:8. Has he not moreover told us, that it is part of our highest consolation, while in this vale of tears, to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ?" Tit. 2:13. Wherefore, then, deny our faith, and let go our profession, at the very moment when we are about to enter upon the possession of its eternal fruits and promises? Terror and trepidation, at such an hour, and at such a prospect, Luther pronounced suspicious and unfavorable symptoms, which pertain rather to the unrenewed and the lost, than to such as have been washed in the Saviour's blood, and justified by faith in the word of his Gospel. He that cometh is not an angry tyrant, not a relentless foe,

but our own dear Lord and Redeemer, who loved us unto death, and whom we profess to love, coming to receive us into his own everlasting glory. Shall we trust in him now, and believe that he has satisfied for our guilt, and not continue to trust in him then, when he is about to be revealed as our eternal deliverer from every remaining evil? Let the wicked tremble, and those be in anguish who have never consented that he should be their Saviour; but as for those who have tasted of his goodness, let them look up, and lift up their heads.

And if the indications of the nearness of that day were even far less than they really are; if, instead of the great mass of evidence from fulfilled prophecy which we have to show that our Lord's return is at hand, we should be able only to refer to a few particulars pointing in that direction; it ought to fill us with rejoicing. The fewest weeds, floating upon the sea of time, indicating that we are drawing toward the continent of glory,—the smallest flowers here and there, however fragile, if messengers of the approaching springtime of immortal blessedness, ought to awaken in us emotions of the intensest gladness. And now that the signs are so numerous, and daily becoming more and more intense, shall we not note them with joyous hearts, and rouse us up as men who really expect to be saved?

> Awake, awake! the call is ringing,
> And watchmen on the heights are singing,
> Awake, awake, Jerusalem!

Midnight cries aloud are sounding,
The searching inquiry propounding.
Where are ye, virgins wise and trim?
Up! up! the Bridegroom's near!
Up! let your lights appear!
Halleluia!
Up, and prepare, His Feast to share,
The time has come to meet him there!

Zion hears the watchmen singing;
Her heart with bounding joy is springing;
She wakes, she casts her gloom away.
Comes her Friend from heaven all glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
Light breaks,—foretoken of the day!
Come, worthy of the crown,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son!
Hosianna!
For th' halls of peace, we fall in place,
To banquet on thy finished grace.

Glory, everlasting glory,
Let men and angels sing before Thee,
With harps and cymbal's clearest tone.
Pearls are thy bright city's portals;
With angels there, and pure immortals,
We mate and meet around thy throne!
Nor eye hath seen, nor ear
Hath e'er attained to hear,
Such joys as these.
Sweet jubilee, all trammels free,
We celebrate eternally.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

MATT. 11 : 2–10. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

THE question which John sent from his prison to Jesus, was one of vital import. "Art thou (*ὁ ἐρχομενος*) the coming One, —the Messiah, or do we look for another?" To be in doubt here is to be in doubt of Christianity, and in doubt of the basis of salvation. We need to be settled upon this point with unmistakable assurance, for it lies at the foundation of all Christian faith. Not to know whether Jesus is the Messiah or not, is not to know whether the Gospel is any better than modern Judaism, Mahometanism, or any other system of religion by which men are deluded.

We must know that Jesus is the Christ, or our preaching is vain, our faith also is vain, and we are yet in our sins.

But, could it be possible that John was in any doubt upon this point? Had his long incarceration so affected his convictions, that he could no longer credit the brilliant testimony which he had given on the subject? Some have so interpreted the record, and accordingly refer to the bold Baptizer as an illustration how the strongest and clearest in faith not only have their dark hours, but at times waver respecting the very foundations on which they rest. But if such a burning and shining light as John could doubt upon a point like this, by what laws of right can we hold the poor ignorant masses responsible for their unbelief and unsteadfastness? Not such a bundle of fig leaves for men to cover their nakedness with, was this rugged preacher of repentance. Otherwise, what becomes of the Saviour's testimony with regard to him? "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? a reed shaken with the wind?" A shaken reed, certainly; what else, if it were true that he had thus come into doubt whether Jesus was the Christ or not? "But what went ye out for to see? a prophet? yea," saith the Saviour, "a prophet." But does it comport with the character of a prophet to doubt the declarations which he feels himself commissioned and driven by Almighty God to deliver? Nay, further, the Saviour affirms that John was "more than a prophet." He was himself the subject of

prophecy, and had lived to see, with his own eyes, the fulfilment of his prophesying, and had direct and miraculous attestations from the sky that his testimony was true. Could he be this assured messenger of God, and yet be in a state of uncertainty as to whether he had taken hold on the right man or not? Such a view of the case impeaches at once the character of John and the veracity of Jesus. We dare not admit it for a moment. John did not falter in his faith.

Others take the ground that it was for his disciples' sakes, to convince and satisfy their minds, that he sent them to Jesus with this question. This view, though more general, is equally unsatisfactory. These disciples had seen Christ's miracles before; how could they need to be sent to see them again? And if they had any doubts about the Messiahship of Jesus, they certainly had none about the prophetic character of John. Their own master's words would therefore have gone further to settle their scruples, than the answer of one in whom they as yet had very little confidence. Christ also treated the question throughout as the personal inquiry of John himself, and not as one relating to the confirmation of doubting disciples who merely conveyed it. It is an assumption, also, not at all in the record, that John's disciples needed any confirming touching the Messiahship of Jesus. If they attended to John's testimony, as we must suppose they did, the presumption is that they already were fully certified on this point. And if both John and

Jesus thus dealt, merely to convince and confirm the bearers of their respective messages, they conducted matters in this case in a way altogether anomalous. When John had anything to say to men, he said it direct, and in a way in which there was no mistaking of his meaning. Officials of the church and rulers in the state, as well as the common masses of men, were the witnesses of this fact. And he who feared not Herod, his prisons, or his executioners, would not have stood in such awe of his disciples as to invent a ruse to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Nor can we conceive of the guileless Son of God as a party to such strategy. These messengers from John had their share in the light and benefit of the transaction, but it was not for their sakes that these messages were primarily sent. It was John's question, and it concerned John himself above all others.

Equally to be avoided is that method of handling this subject, to which some have resorted, by which the whole thing is made to evaporate in empty explanations. There was meaning, substance, and character in the matter; otherwise it never would have been allowed to come in as part of that inspired record meant to make us wise unto salvation. To explain away the Scriptures, is no way of using them to any profit. We had much better not have them, than to be tasked with the work of making them mean nothing. Our business is to search them; and if one view of a passage will not bear testing, we must inquire

deeper, until we find one which preserves the literal statements in their full force, and yet conforms throughout to the analogy of faith, and to what must not be surrendered in any direction in which they may bear. And when a construction is found which meets these requirements, we are to take it, and rest assured that it is the true meaning of the Spirit.

That the question which John sent to Jesus is, and was intended to be, an expression of mental disturbance on his part, may be taken as settled. The words convey it; the Saviour in his answer assumed it; and all the circumstances concur in the proof that it was so. But what sort of disturbance it was, and the precise limits to which it extended, can only be understood by a proper appreciation of the stand-point which John occupied, connected with the state of facts at the time the question was submitted.

Nothing is plainer now, than the gradual unfolding of the Messianic work, by different and widely separated stages. Each, as it transpires, embodies also, in some degree, what is to follow. The work is *one piece*, accomplished by one Divine-human Person. But it has its separate and distinct parts, allotted to separate and distinct times. The Incarnation, life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, constituted one great part of it, which was arranged for one period. But the administration of the Saviour at the right hand of the Father, and the institution of the dispensation of the Spirit, which still stands.

form another part of it, which appertains to an other period. And a still further and most momentous part of it, is Christ's coming again, "with power and great glory," to judge the world for its iniquities, overthrow usurpers, reverse the curse, liberate his people from their depressions, afflictions, and graves, and enforce the eternal laws of righteousness. This also has its own fixed time in the future, "which the Father hath put in his own power."

But whilst all this is understood now, it was not understood up to the time of Christ's ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The old prophets knew nothing of *two* comings of the Messiah, thus widely separated in point of time. They indeed prophesied largely of things relating to these distinct Advents, but always blended one with the other. They spoke of his coming to suffer and die, but they spoke vastly more of his coming to judge and reign. Take, for example, the seventy-second Psalm, which all agree in regarding as Messianic in its character. If Solomon was in the foreground of the picture, Christ, after all, was its principal subject. But the description there runs: "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all

generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The Kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the Kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Or, take the thirty-fifth of Isaiah, which is purely and simply Messianic: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes." Or, to come still closer, take those passages to which John's question seems to

refer, and which the Saviour had in his eye, and appropriated as Messianic, in his reply: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prisonhouse." (Is. 42: 6, 7.) "The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." (Is. 61: 1–3.)

In all these passages it is plainly to be seen, that they include Christ's earthly life and personal ministry; and that they in like manner include his subsequent ministry by his Spirit, word, and sacraments. But it is equally plain that they also include a vast deal which has not yet been fulfilled. Their fullest literal import reaches forward to the period of the judgment, and the victorious realization of the kingdom when Christ shall come again. Judgment, vengeance upon evil doers, and judicial rectifications of all present inequalities and disorders, are set down in the fore-

front of all these and such like Messianic predictions. And yet, the whole is given as one picture, and as if all the particulars were to fall out together in one and the same period of time. No separate stages of fulfilment at different epochs are at all distinguished. This is a peculiarity of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. And as John was a prophet of the old dispensation, though standing within the margin of the new, his ideas of the Messiah took the impress of the Old Testament model. They were correct, but they were *summary*, and without discrimination as to times and seasons. To him, first coming and second coming, and everything falling between them, were all one, just as they were to the old prophets. He accordingly put into the foreground that upon which the prophetic Spirit has always laid the most stress, but which is really the last to be fulfilled. The judgment, which is to complete the Messianic work, was his chief theme. He commenced by proclaiming to the people, that the axe was now laid at the root of the trees; that the great Messiah was even then already moving unknown among them, and would presently be revealed for the accomplishment of everything that the prophets had said of him; that every tree found destitute of good fruit was about to be hewn down and cast into the fire; that the igneous baptism of righteous judgment was on the point of being poured out; that the anointed One had his fan in hand to purge his floor, gather the wheat, and burn the chaff with

unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3 : 10–12.) He had no idea that the Christ was to spend his earthly life in such meek humility, and then leave the world to run for yet thousands of years before the judgment. And as he had seen the prophecies, his own among the rest, so far fulfilled that the Messiah had now come, he could have no other thought but that everything was at once to run to its consummation.

Here, then, we strike the root of his whole difficulty. It was not that he doubted the Messiahship of Jesus, for that he could not doubt; but he could not understand why Christ did not forthwith go forward in all the grand manifestations pertaining to his Christhood, assert his authority, and enforce his kingdom. This troubled John, perplexed his mind, and excited his impatience. Were there to be two Christs, as some of the Jewish interpreters sometimes imagined? This he could not take in. But why, then, did not Jesus, whom he knew to be from God, assert his dominion, break in pieces the wicked, and deliver his people? Was it not his Messianic office and charge thus to "break in pieces the oppressor," "bring out the prisoners from the prison," "proclaim liberty to the captives," "deliver the needy," recompense the just, and make "the righteous flourish?" Why then was his own relative and faithful witness left to suffer unhelped? How came it that he, of all mere men then living the most entitled to the favors of the new kingdom, was permitted to pine in chains,

while his infamous persecutors were at large, and full of the joys of luxury and power? What could be the cause of such dilatoriness and delay? John could not understand it, or endure to remain silent under it. And by all the high claims of Jesus to the Messiahship, by all the testimonies which identified him as the Christ, and by all the unmistakable predictions of the Scriptures touching the Messianic work, he appeals to him for an explanation. Hearing in the prison the works of Christ, he sent to express a tinge of indignation at such meekness. Was this the way the Spirit of truth foretold that the thing should be done? Had he not, by inspiration of God, announced the coming to be, to assert Divine dominion, rebuke iniquity, and deliver the waiting people by the victorious arm of power? Was not this the proper Messianic work? Did not the fulfilment of the Scriptures depend upon the exercise of these very offices? These few healings and meek lessons, what were they toward the effectual accomplishment of the promised dominion? Why this hesitancy, this delay, especially when his faithful harbinger lay silenced and wasting in the jail of an Idumean tyrant? Was some other to come to fulfil what it is the Messiah's mission to perform? "Jesus, I know thou art the Christ, but I cannot abide this inaction. Explain the matter, and relieve the darkness which is thus being cast upon thy servant's words, and upon thine own claims. Either bring to an end this inexplicable delay, or tell us plainly

if we are to expect another to do what we believe to be thy predicted work."

We thus behold the true state of John's mind, and the scope of his message. The sturdy Baptizer did not disbelieve that Jesus was the Christ, but he felt there was a mistake somewhere. He saw in Jesus the appointed one of God, but was perplexed, disappointed, and personally hurt, at the tardy way in which he was proceeding. The man he knew, but the method was a mystery, and offensive to all his divinely certified learning in the case. He did not yet know how the Divine plan is distributed through separate ages. He had not yet learned that the omnipotent assertion and outward victorious enforcement of the Messianic dominion by the spirit of judgment and burning, was reserved for a long subsequent period. And his trouble was the more disturbing, in proportion to his confidence that Jesus was the Christ, and that his own mission was from God. It was no want of faith, but a perplexity founded on faith, and springing directly out of his assurance that he had neither mistaken himself nor the Christ. And a great, terrible, soul-trying perplexity it was, which no light he then had could at all relieve. All his thinking had come into a dilemma, and he knew not yet how to escape from it. How could this thing be! He saw there was a flaw, but where was it to be found? He could not give up faith in Jesus as the Christ, and yet he could not be reconciled to this slow method of procedure. He

could no give up faith in his own inspired predictions, which had been already in part fulfilled, and yet he to whom they pointed was not fulfilling them in their highest and chief particulars. His embarrassment was of the most profound and harassing kind. He was hemmed in by indubitable Divine testimonies on all sides, and yet his facts would not harmonize, and all he could do would not make them harmonize. We can hardly conceive of more perplexing straits than those to which his very faith shut him in. It was not doubt, but something more perplexing and troublesome than doubt. It was not uncertainty of his ground, but a worse bewilderment, begotten by his very certainty. It was not that he had lost confidence, but a greater disturbance, in which his firm and holy convictions on the one side were offended by the course of Him whom his firm and holy convictions on the other assured him could not go wrong. There was, therefore, a reasonable and proper occasion for this embassy and question, apart from all consideration for his disciples.

And with this view, the manner of the Saviour's dealing with it entirely agrees. Very different was his treatment of cases of weak and faltering faith. When Peter's confidence sunk, Jesus reproved him and said: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Matt. 14: 30, 31. When the storm overtook the disciples on the sea, and their hope failed them, "he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye

have no faith?" Mark 4 : 37–40. When the murder of their Master had so unsettled their minds that they stood in doubt of his Messiahship, he met them and said: "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken?" Luke 24 : 25. But nothing of this sort escaped his lips with reference to the question sent by John. There were no upbraidings, no censures, no rebukes. On the other hand, he speaks of John with the greatest respect. He pronounces him a man of unswerving integrity—a prophet—"yea, more than a prophet"—a true messenger of God, himself prophesied of—one who had no superior among those born of woman. He takes his case tenderly in hand, as that of a real sufferer in a matter owing to no weakness or blame of his own. He also links with his answer a word of special benediction, to soothe the trouble of the holy man, still zealous for God even in his prison. And seeing exactly where the cause of the difficulty lay, he kindly prescribes for its removal.

John was looking too intently at those features of Messianic prophecy which respected the judgment, and the manifestation of the kingdom. The Saviour directs his attention to other features that also were prophesied of, and that also needed to be fulfilled first, and furnished the evidence that the fulfilment was going on. There was a ministry of humility to precede the ministry of judgment, about which the prophets had also spoken; and the assurance was given that this

ministry was being faithfully performed. The blind were being restored to sight; the lame were being made to walk; the unclean were being healed; the deaf were having their disabilities removed; the dead were being raised up; and the Gospel was being preached to the poor. This also was predicted Messianic work, and this was successfully going on. John had heard of these things before, but his enthusiasm for the grander miracles of judgment gave them a less importance in his view than pertained to them. Hence the direction: "Go and show John *again* those things which ye do hear and see." Call his attention with more particularity to them. Have him weigh them with care, in the light of the Scriptures and of the Spirit, and he will find them as distinctly foretold as those more decisive things on which his mind is dwelling. Let him look at them in the light of those very prophecies on which he relies, and he will see that things are all going on properly. Let him not be offended with my method. Let him not be disturbed or disheartened. Let him not be perplexed, or vex himself. He will see in these very facts that the work is progressing, and that the blessing will come in due time.

John was impatient for the judgment. He wished to see the work summarily consummated. And he felt that he had the most unmistakable grounds on which to expect this. In these premises the reply of the Saviour gives him right, but refers him to the works that were being done as

relieving the dilemma of his thinking. Those works rightly considered were the beginnings of that very consummation. They were manifestations of the laws and powers of the kingdom. The scale was not very extensive, but sufficient to serve as the earnest and pattern of the whole work to be achieved. They were works of mercy; but so are all the Messianic works. The great and terrible judgment itself is a work of mercy—the putting forth of Almighty goodness for the deliverance of his elect, and for the best interests of his universe. "These things," which were to be shown John, were the tokens of an incoming grace, with the true majesty and power of that very kingdom for which he was looking. We mistake the miracles of Christ, by referring them simply to the apologetics of Christianity. They were proofs of Christ's mission from the Father, but they were vastly more. They were more also than illustrations of the spiritual operations of his grace. They were the forepledges, prelibations, and actual beginnings of the new creation, of conquered evil, banished disability, restored order, perfected good, and eternal blessedness, which finishes up the whole Messianic work. They were the presence of the Christ and his Kingdom evidenced upon the outward world, and heralding that very consummation to which John was looking. Make them universal, and you have everything that the holy prophets have foretold from the foundation of the world. Hence the direction to show John "*again*" these things.

Let him weigh them further, and sift out their whole significance and nature, and he will find his perplexity removed, and see that what he has in mind is really begun, giving certain pledge of the complete realization in due time of all that, the seeming absence of which is so disturbing him.

The Saviour's handling of the case thus answers to what we suppose John's disturbance to have been. The nature of the trouble is reflected in the character of the remedy. That the prescription met the want, and relieved the difficulty, we have every reason to conclude. A new light was shed upon the mind and heart of the anxious and afflicted prisoner. His perplexity was removed. And in the full comfort of faith, he acquiesced in the Saviour's plan, and went triumphant through martyrdom to the bosom of his God.

Assuming, then, that we have reached the true explanation of this interesting part of holy Scripture, we may remark—

1. *The word of the Lord stands firm.* Forty centuries had passed since the voice from heaven gave out the coming of the son of the woman, under whose heel Satan was to be bruised. Generation after generation had risen and disappeared, and century after century had swept by, and one thousand years after another had reached its close, with no indications of the fulfilment. Eve had sons, and grandsons, and great grandsons, but among none of them was to be found that promised seed. The children of Abraham

waxed great, and spread their glory before the world, and waxed small again to a few feeble and dependent tribes, and still the child of promise had not arrived. And, as men reckon, there was reason to regard the whole thing as one of the pretty fancies with which people are pleased to delude themselves. Looked at from a mere earthly standpoint, God's word had gone down never to be recalled. But, though dormant for four thousand years, it was not dead; nor had he who gave it forgotten it. The word of the Lord never dies. It may be long in being fulfilled, but it holdeth good forever. That seed of the woman was promised, and that promise was as true and firm after all the centuries that rolled over it, as it was when it first came from the mouth of the Almighty. Not all the unbelief of the old world, nor the flood which swept it away, nor the apostasies which followed, nor all the revolutions in the history of the chosen tribes, could damage it. And when the appointed time came, John was sent to attest its fulfilment, and to identify the blessed One of whom it spoke. Nothing that God utters can ever miscarry. Heaven and earth may pass away; but His word standeth firm forever.

2. *The work of the Lord goes on.* Men may not understand it. His own servants may often be in perplexity about it, and feel as if their highest hopes have been blasted, and their most cherished convictions and expectations brought to nought. But even in those things which seem most ad-

verse, there is the secure ongoing of the eternal plan and purpose. Elijah may despond, and give up all for lost; and John may be reduced to extremities in which he begins to feel as if his inspired testimony were about to be negatived and confounded; but the cause is safe, and the work is going forward. Our imperfect ideas may be reduced to terrible straits, and our views may often be overcast as if all were about to fail; but even in that which most confuses and disturbs us, the broad and unfailing work for which we are in fear is progressing just as it should. What we may deplore as delay, or interpret as disastrous, is after all the chosen way to the surest triumph. And however slow and inefficient the movements of Christ may seem, they are all right, well timed, adequate and sure, and will in due time achieve to the letter whatsoever he has given to his prophets to declare concerning him or his work.

3. *The consummation cometh.* It may not come as soon as we calculate. There may be many preliminaries first to be disposed of. We may be left to suffer for our fidelity far beyond what we had hoped. But the world will not triumph and persecute forever. The wicked will not flourish in their luxuries and sins forever. The unrighteous and the lewd will not bear rule forever. Herod shall yet be judged for his crimes, and compelled to lay his bloodstained sceptre down. Judgment will not linger perpetually. Jesus will not be the meek and forbearing Naza-

rene always. He is the Christ, and all that pertains to the Messianic work he will perform. Having executed one part of it faithfully, the other part shall not be wanting.

God has no cause for haste. He can afford to wait the time he chooses. He has ample space and unwasting strength, which can never fail him. Eternity is his. Meanwhile many humble suffering ones may be healed, and many penitent suppliants blessed, and many ignorant inquirers taught the way of everlasting life. But the sinner's cup will overflow at last. The blood of murdered innocence shall yet cease to cry unavenged from the earth. The powers of ungodliness shall feel the stroke which shall dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. And when once the gracious Saviour ascends the throne of judgment, and the long-restrained thunders are let loose, and the day of payment for all the wicked world's arrearages of wrath arrives, woe be to the man who has despised his grace and trampled on his Gospel! "For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you which fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." Mal. 4:1, 2.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

John 1 : 19–30. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias.

And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

THIS embassage of the Jewish priests and Levites to John the Baptist, carries with it certain implications which are not unimportant. It shows that they had some expectation, more or less fixed, that the Christ was to come about that time. It also shows that they expected the Messiah to baptize, when he should come, according to the prophecy that he was to sprinkle many nations, Is. 52 : 15; and

that in his day a fountain should be opened for the washing away of sin and uncleanness. Zech. 13 : 1. It shows, further, that they did not consider any one entitled to take upon himself to minister in such solemn matters as the washing of others from sin, unless authorized and commissioned of God so to do. It showed in addition that they expected the Christ to be preceded by some great prophet, Elias, according to Malachi 4 : 5, or some other divine messenger, in some sort to serve in the introduction of the expected kingdom of peace. It also would appear that they were much more favorably impressed with the idea of John being the Christ, than they were with the claims of the Messiah himself.

It is part of the experience of most people, who have possession of the Divine word and promises, to be looking out in some manner for the blessings and salvation of which that word treats, and yet to be directing their hopes to wrong quarters, and basing them on inadequate grounds. Piety as a mere sentiment, or as a system modified not to bear too heavily upon the pride and selfishness of the human heart, people are very willing to embrace. These priests and Levites could have taken this son of their brother Zecharias for the Christ, if he had only ventured to assert himself to be the Christ. Him they hardly would have stoned, and his call to repentance they would hardly have despised, provided that they could use his name and fame to dignify themselves. They claimed for them-

selves to be very devout and orthodox waiters for the Messiah, and yet, with it all, was the self-seeking and knavery which prompted them to propose to John their adherence and patronage, on the calculation that in case of his being the Messiah, it would quite well suit their ideas. "Sly foxes," says Luther, "who thus offer honor to John in order that they may get to themselves all the benefit of it—offer him an apple for a kingdom, and barter their counters for his florins."

But religion is not a thing of mere sentiment, trade, or accommodation to the carnal tastes and reckonings of men. It is a thing of principle, of self-denial, of humility, and of inflexible righteousness. And no man can truly find, receive, and enjoy the Christ and his Kingdom, but those who have learned to know and feel their own worthlessness, to lay aside all their carnal reasonings and preferences, and to confess and take him whom God hath sent, though it should lead to dishonor before men, to prison, and to the cross. And if we would know exactly how we are to demean ourselves, and what state of mind and heart we are to seek for, in order rightly to apprehend the Christ, and to become partakers of the light and life there is in him, we may find a beautiful example, for our direction, in the case of John, as set forth in the words before us. In this view, then, let us look at the picture, and endeavor to translate it practically into ourselves.

The subject, as I propose to treat of it, is:

THE CONFESSION OF JOHN.

I. *As it respected himself.*
II. *As it respects the Christ.*
III. *As it respects our reception of the Christ.*

And may God open our hearts to the light and truth which he thus proposes to us!

I. The account given of John's answer to the deputies, is particularly emphatic. It would seem as if more words were used than were required. But such is not the case. The occasion was a momentous one. The noblest and most revered officers of the Jewish establishment were addressing him. Their proposal evinced toward him a readiness to award to him the highest place, glory, and influence in the realm. And the temptation to him was to keep silence, to deny Christ, or to withhold that clear confession of him which pertained to him as Christ's forerunner. But the nobility, fidelity, and humility of the man appear in three points. He did not keep silence, but "*confessed*," that no one might be left under false impressions by his refusal to answer. And avoiding an equivocal silence, he was equally careful not to utter himself in doubtful words; "*he denied not*"—allowed nothing to escape him which could possibly reflect injuriously upon the honor and claims of the Saviour, to whom he was sent to bear witness. Nay more, he so framed his answers as to give distinct and unmistakable testimony that Jesus,

and not himself, was the Christ. He "confessed" his Lord, clearly, fully, and with unflinching positiveness and decision.

We thus behold a denial and depreciation of self, and a personal humility and honesty of dealing, which we cannot but admire, and which, indeed, are the necessary attendants of all true faith and righteousness.

1. "He confessed, *I am not the Christ.*" This is a hard confession for poor disordered human nature. Though the symptoms of death and damnation are working in every part of it, and searing the world and the lower creation all around it, it is still pervaded with the idea that it can yet be its own saviour. Progress in human science, enlightenment through human wisdom, and the efficacy of human works, prayers, penances, and virtuous endeavors, are the natural man's hope. He may be willing to take the baptism and reform of John, with it to gild and exalt his own pretensions, but he is offended with the idea that he is only "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," notwithstanding all his endeavors, apart from the proper Christ, the only Saviour of sinners. True religion is not the culture and polishing of the old carnal nature, but the condemnation and utter destruction of it. It is not the putting of new wine into old bottles, or the sewing of new cloth into an old garment, but the entire repudiation of the old man, and the implantation of a new one, which proceeds only from Christ. And he who has no higher

conception of sanctification than the gradual improvement of the old Adamic nature, is yet as far from salvation as these priests and Levites, who were ready to take John as the Messiah, in preference to Jesus. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and with all the efforts of men, individually, socially, or politically, it will forever remain the same corrupt thing that it was at its birth. Its proper end is the grave and perdition. There is no hope for it but in the new, pure, and perfect life derived from Christ Jesus, by means of his atonement, grace, and ministrations of power. And he who has not been brought to see, feel, and acknowledge this, both in the sphere of the individual soul, and in the sphere of the community and the race, has not yet reached that important and indispensable confession of John: "*I am not the Christ.*"

The truth is, that we are all, at our best estate, mere helplessness and vanity. All our intelligence and attainments—all our reformations and services as good citizens and members of society—all our doings for ourselves, and the improvement of our fellow-men—can neither save us, nor save any one else. It may be humiliating for us to admit it, and it so offends the natural heart that thousands and millions stumble at it; but that does not alter it. We are not the Christ. He does not come out of us, or out of our endeavors and achievements. No progress or culture of the old Adam can produce him. And all our finery of virtue, wisdom, fame, and doings, are mere adorn-

ments of death, and garlandings of what is doomed to destruction, apart from the Christ that cometh from heaven, to atone for us by his blood, and to deliver us by his power. Neither can we at all find and receive the Christ to our proper peace, until we have honestly and intelligently made this unequivocal confession. In this, as in many other things, John is our pattern and teacher.

2. He confessed that he was not Elias, nor any other of the old prophets returned to the world. He had, indeed, exhibited "the spirit and power of Elias," and was, in some sense, that "Elias which was for to come." Matt. 11:14. But such wrong conceptions were in the minds of his interrogators with reference to the office of Elias, as also of that other prophet of whom they dreamed, that he answered with equal clearness upon these points, that he was neither the one nor the other, as they were looking at the matter. He was indeed "a prophet; yea, more than a prophet," but not in the sense, and for the purposes, they were ready to receive him. His mission was simply to point out the Christ, and to turn the attention of men to the Christ; whereas these priests and Levites wished rather to build themselves up on his personal dignity and fame, and to use him as the organ of their own glorification. Ah, the deceitfulness and treachery of the human heart! These will show themselves in the most sacred things, and put on the most pious garbs. To have such great prophets whom we can call our own, to have such popular and

famous ministers, to be united with such a grea and mighty Church, to have such wonderful revivals, as the results of the agencies we acknowledge or send; this pleases and delights the natural man. Whether the Christ is acknowledged and embraced or not, that is another question. Let him pursue his quiet way if he chooses; or, if he becomes too pressing in his demands, let him be scourged, and crucified, and put out of the world; what matters that, if Elijah is our leader, or some resurrected prophet is our head! Give us some Elias; give us some dead prophet of whom the books tell so famously; give us the powerful preacher of the wilderness only; and we are content, whatever may become of that man of Nazareth! Men forget that all the Moseses, Elijahs, Isaiahs, and prophets, and preachers, in the world, or out of it, however illustrious and mighty, are nothing, and worse than nothing, except as they declare and conduct to the one only Christ. Here also, then, the example of John comes in as our pattern, teaching us to renounce all claims, all proposals, all prophets, all prophecies even, save as they exalt the Christ, and set him forth, and lead to a right acknowledgment and acceptance of him. As John was neither Elias, nor any other prophet, to them that refused the Christ, so neither are all our boasted possessions, of the past or the present, of the Old Testament or the New, however precious or sacred, of any worth or reality to us, so long as they come between us and our true Saviour

It is only the obedient reception of the Christ, that makes even his own prophets true prophets unto us, or their sublime missions of any avail to our souls.

3. But John still further confessed, that, in comparison with the Messiah, he was unworthy of the lowest place, or the most menial services—unworthy to unloose his shoe's latchet. The greatest of men sink into nothingness before the glory of the Christ. And if such was John's unworthiness,—a man of all men the most self-denying and rigid—a man filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb—a man than whom there had not been a greater born,—what must be ours, who have gone astray from our youth up, and whose sins of heart and life, of omission and commission, are more than can be counted! Oh, how much have we done, in every sphere and relation of our lives, that we ought not to have done, and left undone that we should have done! What mercies have we abused, what privileges misimproved, what opportunities wasted, what talents neglected, or employed to no good purpose! And if God were to enter into judgment with us this day for half the sins and defections that stain our history, alas, what would be our portion. Nay, if we were required to answer only for the iniquities which have defiled us since we came this morning into the sanctuary of God, who could hope to stand? Verily, there is not one of us worthy to unloose the sandal-strings of the Saviour's feet! And all this we need to feel and

humbly to confess, in order that we may learn the preciousness of our Redeemer, and receive him unto salvation.

II. But John gave "a good confession" *respecting Jesus*, as well as with regard to himself. In proportion to his understanding of his own place and character, was the excellency of his perception and testimony concerning the person and office of his Lord. All christological errors and misapprehensions have their root in wrong estimates of the condition and necessities of human nature. Let it be once clearly ascertained what our helplessness and miseries are, and we will have no difficulty in understanding and appreciating the Christ.

1. John bore record that Jesus had an existence anterior to himself (ὃς ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, *who is before or previous to me*. See also verse 30). As to his human life, he was not before John, but was born months after him. This expression, therefore, carries us back to the pre-existence of the Son of God, and affirms of him a being which runs into the past eternity, and up into the high mysteries of his divine sonship and Deity. The Christ is not a mere man. He is the incarnate Son of God, who was with God before the world was, and who is God. John 1:1–14. We have not a mere arm of flesh to our Saviour, but the omnipotent and eternal Son of the omnipotent and eternal Father—"God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made; consubstantial with the Father, by whom

all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man,"—"perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting, ... not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person."

2. And yet, with this Divine pre-existence, John further describes him as coming after him. This was true of his human birth and earthly ministry. The herald goes before the king. Though from eternity, as respected his Godhead, he became the Christ by becoming incarnate, living himself into a human life, and undertaking what our salvation required. He thus took historical existence in time, though possessed of infinite existence in eternity.

3. And this mysterious and wonderful Person, John further affirmed to be then present. His words are: (*μέσος ὑμῶν ἕστηκε*), "*In the midst of you he hath taken his stand.*" It was a reproach to them that they knew him not, and did so pass him by to take John in preference; but, he was there, and any one in real search for him, could find him. And so Christ is always nearer to men than their carnal way of reasoning would suppose. He is never far from where his prophets and servants are, or from where the word of his testimony is being uttered. In the midst of every congregation of listeners to those whom God hath sent, he may be found. In his word and in his sacrament, he is even here, among us, this day,

in this very house, to manifest his loving-kindness, to speak his Messianic grace, and to work in every heart his glorious Messianic deliverance. In our carnal unbelief and deadness, we may look, and listen, and go away, and not know that we were in a presence so august, and not realize at all that it was the Saviour's voice we heard, or the great Redeemer's saving proposals to which we paid so little respect. But it is no fault of his. He is here. He hath taken his stand in the midst of us. He is present to be the Messiah, with all the fulness of his Messianic blessings, to every one who is willing and ready so to accept him. These very words and lessons, as they are spoken and read this hour, exhibit him to you. These very elements, consecrated and used by his command, hold him up to your contemplation. This whole service, from commencement to end, is his own divine movement to arrest your attention, and awaken your faith, and bring you into hallowed and saving communion with himself. And so true is this, that not one here present need go from this house to-day without having found him, to the everlasting consolation of his or her soul. But, alas! though he standeth in the midst of us, many gaze on, and depart unprofited; for they know him not.

4. Still further, John proclaims Jesus "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Whether John as yet comprehended all that was involved in this precious text, is somewhat doubtful. The prophets were not

always conscious of the full import of their words. John had generally spoken of the Messiah more as a baptizer with fire—an administrator of righteous judgment—a hewer down of the trees unplanted of God, which were encumbering and oppressing the earth. He had largely conceived of him as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," clothed with majesty, and terrible power, and holy indignation toward the usurpations and wickednesses of the world. And such is a prominent and most real part of the Messianic character. This aspect of his work stands out with marked conspicuity in all the predictions concerning him. And it was altogether natural that this feature should fasten most powerfully upon the imagination of a man so austere and rigorous in his tone and temper, as was this mighty preacher of repentance and reformation. Beautifully and most significantly, therefore, does this sentence embody itself in his testimony. It presents the blessed Saviour as a sin-bearer, even though he is also a sin-punisher. Nor is this the only place, or the only occasion, in which even John thus testified of Jesus. On another day, he directed his eyes to the Saviour as he passed before him, and repeated the same words: "Behold the Lamb of God!" verse 34. Isaiah had also spoken of him under the same imagery, and with the same allusion. Is. 53:7. And even before the throne and elders in heaven, he appeared to the Apocalyptic seer in the same character, as the foundation on which alone he was entitled to proceed

with the fiery acts of his last great judicial administrations.

Thus, in the midst of the severities of judgment ascribed to the Messiah, we also have a high and touching testimony to his innocence, patience, and uncomplaining meekness. These are all distinguishing qualities of the lamb, and above all, of the sacrificial lamb, which was always "without spot or blemish." And when Jesus is pronounced to be God's Lamb, it is thereby affirmed of him that he "was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,"—free from every taint, and pure as the heavens from which he came;—that he was "meek and lowly in heart," affable, tender, compassionate, and loving;—and that he was forbearing, gentle under injuries, long-suffering, and unresistingly submissive. Nor do we need any better evidence of this than that which appears in the manner in which he has borne with false Christians, and wicked men, and governments, for these eighteen hundred years since his exaltation to universal power and dominion; or in the manner in which he has borne with our own individual ignorances, unbeliefs, abuses of his mercies, and sinful behavior towards his Gospel and commands. Oh, how meekly and patiently he has waited upon us in our slowness to receive, and obey, and credit his word! How leniently and gracious he has borne the ten thousand repulses which we have given him, and his Spirit, and his loving overtures to us! And, with all, he takes his stand in the

midst of us again this day, and again offers himself to us, ready to forget forever all our past wrongs and harshnesses, and to be to us all that ever he proposed to be, notwithstanding our many defections, insults, and former resistances of his tender love! Still, he cometh unto us; and still the words of John hold good, that he cometh as "the Lamb of God!" Oh, "how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" Zech. 9:17.

But very imperfect would be our conception of this beautiful testimony of John, if we were to take this as all, or even the chief thing, that it signifies. Jesus is the Lamb of God, not only in allusion to the natural qualities of the lamb, but more especially in reference to the place it filled in the holy services of the ancient people of God. "The lamb of God," was the lamb devoted to God as an offering for sin—the sacrificial lamb. By specific appointment of God, for ages, the blood of animal sacrifices, consisting mainly of lambs, flowed on Jewish altars. Twice every day, in the tabernacle and the temple, as long as the one or the other stood, a lamb thus yielded up its life in the service of Jehovah and his people; and once every year, in every family circle, the paschal sacrifice was offered with peculiar solemnity, from the going forth out of Egypt to the evening before the crucifixion of Jesus. All these slaughterings of lambs were intended and observed as acknowledgments of sins, and of their remission only through the shedding of

blood. In themselves they had no virtue for such a purpose. It was not possible that the offering of such "gifts and sacrifices could make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience." Heb. 9 : 9. Only as anticipative and prefigurative of some great and all-availing offering afterwards to occur, can we find the true and proper vindication of their appointment or observance. But, in them, and by virtue of that which they looked to and prefigured, the ancient believers beheld the cancelling of their sins, and the forthcoming of the favor of God to bless and protect them. By them, conscientiously observed in the spirit of true faith, judgment was turned aside, and grace and mercy became the portion of the people. The sacrificial lamb thus bore away their sins, and the believing worshipper secured thereby the character and treatment of a forgiven man, whose iniquities were no longer remembered against him. And when John, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, pronounced Jesus "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," he declared him to be the appointed and availing sacrifice in whom, somehow, was to be cancelled forever all the guilt and penalty which the wickedness of mankind had incurred.

The same is also declared in other portions of the Scriptures. Isaiah prophesied of him as "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities," and made to bear the stripes of chastisement by which we are healed. Is. 53 : 5. Paul proclaims him "our passover, sacrificed for

us." 1 Cor. 5 : 7. The Epistle to the Hebrews affirms that "he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." 9 : 26. Peter says that he, "his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree." 1 Pet. 2 : 24. John says, "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2 : 2. And even the ransomed in heaven sing unto him, saying, "Thou art worthy; . . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Rev. 5 : 9.

We cannot, therefore, be mistaken in this, that Christ's Lambhood refers to sacrificial work, even more intensely than to his personal qualities. We also miss the very heart and substance of the Gospel, and the foundation on which all the promises and hopes of Christianity repose, if we fail to see, believe, and realize, that his life was made an offering for sin, and that in his sufferings and death there was real answering for human guilt, and the bearing of it away forever from all who truly trust to this feature of the Gospel. He is "the Lamb of God" pre-eminently, as our sin-bearer—our passover—our sacrifice—our propitiation—in whose blood, and obedience unto death, there is a perfect, clean, and everlasting blotting out of all remembrance of sin to every one that believeth. And in this character, even more than when John saw him approaching him, does he now approach us, offering to cover up, and make as though they had never been, whatever guilt may be clinging to

our consciences, or disturbing our peace. In these very words which are dropping upon your ears, and in this very sacrament which you are about to handle with your hands, he cometh to you, as your sacrificial Lamb, to take away your sins, and the sins of as many as will open their hearts to receive him.

III. But, *how shall we receive him?* On this point the confession of John is equally significant and suggestive.

1. We are to give heed to the testimony of Christ's own heralds. The Christ comes not, except he first sends messengers before him to prepare his way. John the Baptist was such a messenger. When he was asked, "Who art thou? What sayest thou of thyself?" His answer was, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias." Jesus himself said of him, "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." Matt. 11 : 10. And for a like purpose, the seventy disciples were sent "into every city and place, whither he himself would come." Luke 10 : 1. By these messengers the tidings of his approach were promulgated, and by their testimony the people were to learn to know him, and to be ready for him. And as it was then, so it is still. We can only learn to know and receive the Christ by means of the testimony of his witnessing servants. Pre-eminent

among these, are the men who speak to us in the inspired Scriptures; and, next to them, are those who preach to us the divine word, and minister to us in sacred things. Wherever the Bible is read, or the Gospel preached, there is the voice in the wilderness, to make the hearer ready to embrace the Christ. And to that voice we must give ear. Its testimony we must regard. And its message we must accept and lay to heart. If we will not give heed to these messengers and heralds of the Christ, we never can know him, or receive him.

2. We must set ourselves to work upon Christ's way. The burden of John's message was, "make straight the way of the Lord." When a king is to visit a distant portion of his realm, it is the business of all good subjects, as soon as they have tidings of the fact, to leave their own private occupations, and to devote their energies to the clearing of the way for him, and for having it in a state befitting his majesty. This is the imagery employed in the text; and it is exceedingly significant. The way for the entrance of Christ into our hearts is naturally crooked, uneven, and in desperate condition. It is not such as becomes the King. The rocks and brushwood of prejudice, the sidelings of proud and carnal reasoning, the deep tracks of evil habit, the mudholes of lust, the high hills of worldly ambition and selfishness, the ravines and rushing streams of sensual gayety and pleasure, the windings and doublings of the deceitful heart, all are impediments to be re-

moved, in order that the King's progress may not be hindered, and his coming not prevented. He will not travel except on straight and even ways, which alone are fitting to him. And that he may have such a way to our souls, we must forsake *our* ways, to work on *his*.

3. And most of all, we must fix our eyes and hearts on him as he comes, as the chief joy and treasure of our souls. John seeing him coming unto him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" And in that simple "*Behold*," we have the highest and crowning direction for the right reception of the Christ. It was a *look* that betrayed the whole world into sin and condemnation, and it is a *look* that again unites men with their proper Lord, and recovers them from their guilt and misery. But it must be an earnest look,—a look of faith,—a look of appreciative confidence,—a look which transfers the whole trust and affection of the heart to the object on which it rests,—a look which draws after it the entire wish and desire of the soul. Such a look Andrew had, when he rushed in search of his brother Simon, saying, "We have found the Messias!" Such a look Philip had, when he went to Nathanael exclaiming, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write!" John 1:41–45. And such a look, my brethren, is in the power of every one of us this day. O the blessedness of our privileges!

There is life for a look, at Him who now comes,
  There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, mortal, look unto Him and be saved—
  Unto Him who from sin maketh free.

O take, with rejoicing, from Jesus at once,
  The life everlasting He gives;
And know, with assurance, thou never canst die,
  Since Jesus thy righteousness lives.

There is life in a look, at the Lamb as He comes,
  There is life at this moment for thee;—
Then look, mortal, *look* unto Him and be saved,
  And find thyself spotless as He.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Luke 2 : 1–14. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men

UR Gospel for this day—the gladdest perhaps which the Church year brings us—conducts to one of the lowliest yet sublimest scenes of which the Scriptures speak. It is not a little remarkable, that an event in which everything great and blessed in Christianity, and in our hopes as Christians, is rooted, should take us down so low, and into

surroundings so humble, and so different from what we would most naturally expect.

First, we have to do with an humble town, of no favorable reputation. It was an old town, as old as the patriarch Jacob; but it had not grown into sufficient importance to be named in the list of villages which Joshua assigned to Judah when the pilgrim tribes took possession of the land. From the time of Jacob till the reign of the Judges, we never hear of it, and then only as the birthplace of a disreputable Levite, who became an idolatrous priest in Micah's house, and the head of the great apostasy of Dan and of the orgies at Laish. The next time it is mentioned, is as the native place of a lewd woman, on whose account a terrible catastrophe befell the tribe of Benjamin. Nor was it till the time of Boaz and Ruth, that anything pleasant is said of it. It is true that David was afterwards born there, and that it took the name of "*The Fruitful*" and "*The House of Bread;*" but the prophets truthfully spoke of it as "little among the thousands of Judah." Micah 5 : 2. Situated near the summit level of the hill country of Judea, and on the margin of the deep and rugged mountainous gorges, which cut their way down to the Dead sea on the east, its fatal lack of water, and the exposure of its surroundings to robbers and wild beasts, which have always, to this day, had their haunts in those savage and almost inaccessible wadies, prevented, as they always must prevent, it from becoming a place of much consequence. It

numbers, now, about two or three thousand inhabitants, and is perhaps nearly as large, and of as much account, at present, as in the days to which the Gospel of this morning refers.

In the next place, we have to do with an humble and broken people. The Jews never fully recovered from their long captivity in Babylon. They had been restored, but not with their former independence and glory. At the time to which the text refers, they were the vassals of Cæsar, and were gathered together at their various family centres, to enrol themselves as the subjects of the Roman power, and to acknowledge their dependence by paying tribute to the Roman government. The last feeble remnants of the sceptre of David and Solomon were departing from Judah. They were a disabled, despised and oppressed race, with no standing among the nations, and of no material force in the world. They were *Jews*, no better thought of then, than now.

In the third place, we have one of the humblest couples of this humbled race—a poor carpenter and his wife,—from the ill-famed village of Nazareth, dragged from their home at a very inopportune time by the iron rigor of an imperial decree. We have ample evidence of the good moral character of these people. They were virtuous and just, and walked humbly with their God; but they were children of penury, who had to earn their daily bread by daily labor, in a very humble department of industry. Afterwards,

when the wife and mother brought the offering of her purification to the temple, it consisted of a pair of turtle doves, the least that the law would accept of the most indigent of Israel's mothers. They were poor Jews, from a despised place, on a humiliating errand, under very embarrassing circumstances, at a very insignificant town, amid a crowd of others on a like mission of acknowledged national and personal degradation.

Following this needy couple to the point of their destination, a still darker feature of the case presents itself. They are lodged in a place ordinarily appropriated to the beasts. The *khan* was full, or they had not the means of commanding a place in it. They were obliged to take refuge in a stable. Tradition says it was a cave. If the place still designated as the spot be the correct one, which most persons are disposed to admit, it was a low rocky grotto, such as are to this day commonly chosen for the housing of sheep and cattle, throughout the whole land of Palestine. I have myself examined many such, in different sections of that country, and seen them used for such purposes. The one in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, is quite of a sort to have induced its selection as a place for confining and sheltering domestic animals. Such a thing as a *stable*, in our sense of the word, is not found among the natives of Syria or Canaan. And when we find Justin Martyr, born and reared in that country, and at his early day, declaring that Christ was born in a grotto, and a common tradi-

tion for fifteen hundred years pointing to a spot answering all the conditions of the record, it is not easy to find a solid reason why we should not believe it. At any rate, this humble and necessitous pair was found lodging in a place devoted to beasts and cattle; for, "there was no room for them in the inn."

But, in all these depths of lowliness, a still more trying necessity arose. That woman, a poor, unprovided stranger, hurriedly hid away for the night, perhaps among the cattle, was unexpectedly called to lay her burden down. Unattended and destitute, in that forlorn and filthy place, she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a common trough. And it is that birth, which is the subject of our joyous celebration this day.

Whether the twenty-fifth day of December is just the exact date of that birth, is not important. We know that it did occur, and it is the birth itself which Christendom is most concerned about, whether this be the precise time of it or not. We are also content to accept this day for the joyous commemoration, for the reason that common consent, from time immemorial, has designated it, above all days, for this especial purpose. The great body of the entire Christian world gathers to-day around that crib at Bethlehem. In the east and in the west, in the north and the south, on the land and floating on the sea, from one end of the world to the other, men,

women and children, of all nations, all tongues, all grades, are this day directing their thoughts to one centre; and that centre is the newborn babe, "wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

This is itself a wonder. The annals of the world present no parallel to it. So universal an interest, on one and the same day, so absorbingly directed to one single object, and that object a babe just born in a place devoted to the beast, is one of the greatest marvels of human history. We can hardly understand or take it in. If the fact were not so clearly and unequivocally demonstrated, we could not credit it for a moment. But it is true, and cannot be gainsaid, that Christendom to-day gathers round the cradle of a child, there to cry its highest thanks to the Almighty Ruler of the universe. Chronology, for a decade and a half of centuries, has been reckoning its years, and noting all earth's transactions, from that obscure advent. The dearest joys of the best and noblest of the race, who have since lived, take their spring from that sorry cattle cave. And temples, and trophies, and triumphs, and hymns, and hopes, and votive offerings, of a thousand sorts, more and more splendid than have ever connected with any other human being, have signalized that manger-cradled child.

From the earliest periods of human existence, sin, and sorrow, that child had been prophesied about. Before Adam and Eve had passed out of the gates of Eden, he was heard of. The patri-

archs had assurances concerning him which made sanctuaries of their coarse tents, comforted their dying moments, and kindled hopes over their dissolving bones. The prophets sung of him amid the trials of the wilderness, and from the heights of Zion, in the days of Jewish glory, and in the nights of Jewish captivity. Seven hundred years before, Micah had said: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting." 5 : 2. At an equally early period, Isaiah anticipated the event, and shouted: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever." 9 : 6, 7. Angels also had given premonitions of his coming. Approaching his virgin mother, before his birth, they said: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his Father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1 :

31–33. Even heathen bards caught up the echoes of inspired heraldry, and sung: "The last era foretold in Cumæan verse is already arrived. The grand series of revolving ages commences anew. Now a new progeny is sent down from lofty heaven. Be propitious, chaste Lucinda, to the infant boy—by him the iron years shall close, and the golden age shall arise upon the world. Under thy consular sway, Pollio, shall this glory of the age make his entrance, and the great months begin their revolutions. Shall any vestiges of guilt remain, swept away under thy direction, the earth shall be released from fear forever; and with his Father's virtues shall he rule the tranquil world." (Virgil, Ecl. iv, Pollio.)

The earth itself seemed to sit in quiet waiting when that child was born. One banner waved o'er half the world, and held all its hostile tribes in awe. For the fifth time only, since Rome was founded, were the bloody gates of the temple of Janus shut. For twelve successive years a profound tranquillity enveloped mankind.

Nor war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around—
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spoke not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was nigh.

The heavens also were affected by that lowly birth, and their dumb bright bodies made to

signal what in that dark cave occurred. Wise men of the far east, trying to read the fate of empires and of men from the heavenly orbs, beheld a new star bursting forth in calm and silent splendor in the joyous firmament, and were convinced of the wonderful advent in Jewry, and came with haste to lay their hoarded treasures at the royal stranger's feet.

Nay, more. The invisible dwellers in the high and holy court of God, were stimulated to new songs and fresh devotions over that lowly birth. Shepherds that night were out on the sloping plains which stretch away from Bethlehem to the northward, quietly guarding their flocks. To their astonished gaze, the heavens opened, bright with the glories of Godhead. "And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them," in glad and peaceful accents explaining what had transpired. "Fear not," was the message, "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger." And, instantly, the sky was thronged with immortal ones.

> The helmed Cherubim,
> And sworded Seraphim,
> Are seen in glittering ranks, with wings displayed,
> Harping in loud and solemn choir,
> With glad expressive notes to Heaven's new-born Heir—

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN."

The joyous hills of Palestine
Sent back the glad reply,
And greeted from their holy heights
The tidings from on high.

O'er the blue depths of Galilee
There came a holier calm,
And Sharon waved in solemn praise
Her silent groves of palm!

Come we, then, this day to worship at the rough couch of a rag-clad infant, in a stable? It is neither an idolatrous, an ignoble, nor an idle deed. Promises and prophecies—histories written before and histories written after—signs in the heavens and signs in the earth—unite in the attestation, that in that filthy grotto we find the radiant centre of the world. Come we to give adoration to that lowly babe? It is not alone we come. Glorious angels as well as simple shepherds, and

Masters of the starry lore
From Ophir's shore of gold,

have been there before us. "The goodly fellowship of the prophets," "the glorious company of the Apostles," "the noble army of the martyrs," all have preceded us in the selfsame services. And "the holy Church throughout the world," there worships with us now. With one mouth she confesses, and with one heart she believes, as we this day confess and believe, "in one Lord

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man," according to this morning's Gospel. Nor was he less worshipful while he lay as a babe in Bethlehem's manger, wrapped in rags, than when he set his compass on the face of the waters, and spoke creation into life.

With prophets and evangelists, then, let us have faith, and comfort ourselves in the great fact wrapped in those humble surroundings. Let it be for skepticism and the sullen-hearted to sneer at "the mystery of the holy Incarnation." Let it be for this world's narrowness and vainglory to ask, "How can I believe that the Almighty Creator of all things should become a wailing infant, and submit to the weaknesses of our nature?" Viewing things in the abstract, and following the suggestions of our own evil hearts, we might be disposed to doubtfulness; but unbelief at this point can only augment our difficulties. It is *fact*, that that humble babe, in after years, untaught even in the feeble learning of his native land, put forth truths beyond all range of human knowledge, and by his quiet teachings here and there, on the hillsides and seashores of Galilee and Judea, created the one grand revolu-

tion in the history of his race. From him did come forth ideas and moral influences which have shaken the mightiest kingdoms, overthrown all preceding forms of philosophy and faith, and cast into a new mould the most distant countries and generations of the earth. And from that dark cavern, where the cattle fed and slept, there has sprung a light, before which the old miscalled religions have one by one died out, and whose genial rays have ever since been felt on all the paths of life as the highest, chiefest, gladdest, and most hopeful treasure in possession of Adam's race. How could this have been, had not Deity been conjoined with that lowly infancy! The thought may be confounding to our feeble reason; but inspiration asserts it; history has added its seal to it; the best and holiest of men devoutly hold and confess it; and why should we be staggered in giving it our confidence! To turn from it, cannot make the mystery less, but only our discomforts and perplexities more. And if for our humble faith we must encounter ridicule and scorn, we may still console ourselves by the example of many blessed spirits, who, in the same holy confidence, have bowed, and shone, and suffered. And in the society of prophets, evangelists, and the good and wise of every nation, if perchance our sins should not be cleansed, and our darkness not illuminated, our unpretending submission may be at least excused.

With the shepherds, then, let us pay our early visits to Bethlehem's manger, to establish our-

selves in the blessed story of salvation, and to refresh our souls with new visions of the holy child, his wonderful person, and his unspeakable grace. There is no limit to the riches that lie hidden under those swaddling bands, or to the blessedness of them that kneel with the heart's adoration at his crude cradle. And as the years come round, let us recur with haste, and warmth, and ardor of spirit, gratefully expressed in all the relations of life, to Bethlehem, to gaze anew on the thing that has come to pass, to refill our minds with the vision of wonder, and to drink ever deeper, and deeper, and deeper, of the heavenly consolations of "peace on earth, and good will toward men."

With the wise men, let us come with worship in our hearts, and treasures in our hands, to lay them both at the holy infant's feet. Nature and revelation combine to direct this in us, as they did to direct it in them. The gold of the highest qualities of our being, the frankincense of our holiest devotion, the myrrh of our most earnest and loving obedience, are the gifts which the stars of heaven, and the words of prophets, call on us to carry to this new-born King. And as He thus turned his back on heaven, and laid aside his form Divine, *for us;* surely it is due, that we should lay aside earth's vanities and sins, *for him.*

And with the holy angels, let us come with joyous songs, and radiant array, and highest thanksgivings to God, that he hath thus visited

and redeemed His people. Let us believe and feel with them, that we have here the fullest outpouring of the infinite goodness of the infinite God. With them let us seek to embody in ourselves the cheerful condescension, and good will, and interest in the ongoing of God's gracious plans of good to earth's suffering generations. And with them, let it be our constant delight to ascribe to the Almighty source of grace and mercy, all the praise and honor and glory of that climax of love, which took form in the infant Jesus, and through him gives eternal life to sinful men.

But, above all, let us remember, as we think of Bethlehem, that there is required for each of us another birth of Jesus, the pangs of which we ourselves must bear, and without which his first cannot avail us much. It is the birth of that selfsame Saviour in a still darker and impurer grotto—the grotto of our dark and wicked hearts. We need him there, as well as the world without had need of him. We need him there to sit and reign in sacred empire, to give light and peace to the disordered world of our erring reason, unruly affections, and perishing souls. He is as ready, also, to make his advent in our unworthy hearts, as in Bethlehem of old. He even stands waiting now to become to each of us an indwelling Lord and Saviour. And as songs of glory attended his advent in the one case, shouts of joy shall not be wanting in the heavenly places, over his more spiritual advent, if entertained in the

other. For, as the shepherd rejoices over the recovery of the lost member of his flock, so there is "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." Nor is there a higher blessedness, that I can wish you on this glad day, than that of "Christ in you the hope of glory."

All hail, Thou noble guest, this morn,
Whose love did not the sinner scorn:
In my distress Thou comest to me;
What thanks shall I return to Thee?

Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
She yet were far too poor to be
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

SECOND CHRISTMAS DAY.

Luke 2 : 15–20. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

THOSE were indeed "glad tidings of great joy" which Gabriel brought from heaven when Jesus was born. A fitting occasion, also, was it for the high song to which the angelic hosts gave utterance. But there was one surprising circumstance about the sublime revelation; to wit, that such exalted and wonderful manifestations were made only to such humble and inconsiderable people. The king, the courtiers about his throne, the priests of the temple, the learned scribes, doctors, and rulers of the community, the great Pharisees and high religionists of the nation, and all the inhabitants of the holy city, were passed by for poor shepherds, lying out in the fields, engaged with their humble flocks. This could not have been without

important significance. It intimated that there was already great defection in God's own house; that those who professed to be nearest to him were not what they thought themselves; that Judaism had but little place for Christianity; and that people of fortune and high estate in the world, are apt to be indisposed and unprepared for the reception of the Gospel, and its higher spiritual excellencies. As one of the older English divines expresses it: "God himself in poverty, comes in a prejudice to them that love riches, and simplicity is folly to crafty persons; a mean birth is an ignoble stain, beggary is a scandal, and the cross an unanswerable objection." But from such a condition of mind God always withdraws himself. It is the poor in spirit, the meek, the lowly, the simple, those of whom this world takes least account, and who take but little account of this world, to whom heaven comes the nearest, and to whom God dispenses his first and highest favors.

There is also another very important truth signified in this circumstance. It demonstrates to us, that plain people, diligent in the pursuit of an humble and honest calling, can therein serve God as acceptably, and rise as high in the Divine favor, as the most exalted officials of church or state. The angels come to Bethlehem's shepherds, in preference to Jerusalem's priests; and employment the most menial, if pursued with honest faithfulness, has more consideration in heaven than all the praying of the Pharisees, and all the abnegations of the Essenes.

Still further are we taught by this circumstance, that the Gospel has nothing to do with adventitious distinctions. It deals with man as man, and has respect to his inward temper rather than to his outward estate. The shepherds were plain unsophisticated men, who lived in close fellowship with nature, and were found faithful in the humble duties committed to them. They were appointed to stay with their flocks, and to keep guard over them; and they were found at their posts, doing their duty honestly, without envy toward the great, and without dissatisfaction at their lot. They were true men, and true to their place; and it was according to these their inward qualities as men, that they were elected to be the first hearers, and the first human preachers of the Gospel. God's favors are for the poor man in his lowly toil, as well as for his rich and haughty neighbor; and a faithful shepherd has more hope than a hypocritical priest, or an ambitious and self-seeking king.

But it is more particularly the behavior of these shepherds with reference to the angelic tidings, to which this morning's Gospel conducts our contemplations. And as they, of all men, were deemed the fittest to be the first recipients of this heavenly proclamation, so may we also find in their conduct under it, a model and pattern for ourselves under the same.

The true Christmas, my friends, is not a thing of one night, or one day. It is forever here. The Christ-birth is an event for all time, ever true, and

ever new. That angelic proclamation is sounding still, for all people, and for all ages. That outshining of the glory of God into earth's darkness. shines on continually; and that song of the heavenly host has not ceased to ring. It is not only heard on the early mornings of the twenty-fifth of December, but it is continued on the twenty-sixth; and on every other day, and week, and month of the year. And it comes to us again this very hour, as really and truly as ever it came, telling of the blessed things which a gracious God has brought about for us, assuring us that a Saviour has been born unto us, and that he even now lies in humble and lowly waiting to receive our homage, and to make us partakers of his eternal kingdom of peace. How, then, are we acting with reference to it? And what can better befit us than to do as these shepherds did?

I. *They received the heavenly manifestation with becoming reverence and awe.* When "the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, they were sore afraid." They instantly thought of God, and referred the whole thing to its proper Divine source. If the same had occurred to the wise of this world, or if they had imitated the spirit which ordinarily prevails, the result would have been very different. Some law of nature would have been called in to dissipate all idea of the Divine or the miraculous, and the whole thing would have been passed with indifference, or noted only as some

strange freak of the elements; as though the hand of God had nothing to do with the laws of nature, or with the phenomena of his own universe. It is one of the stupefying mischiefs of mere worldly science, that, in proportion to its understanding of God's works, it quite disconnects them from God himself. People can see the dust rising from beneath their footsteps to move in their limbs, and pulsate in their hearts; and find the cold metals of the rocks taking vitality in their arteries; and behold the clods of the field transmuted into brains to lead hosts and thrill the world; and witness in every springtime a resurrection more magnificent than the calling up of Lazarus from the grave; and trace in the movements of the heavenly bodies an exquisite clockwork as vast as creation, and a perfection of adjustment which no human skill can imitate; and never once think of Him who presides over it all, and the motions of whose almightiness they are contemplating. They have no sense of the nearness and presence of that Divine Power whose expressions all these things are. They look on, but no check is put upon the current of their ordinary feelings; no reverent dread takes possession of their hearts; no awakening and imposing awe strikes in upon their souls. It is all Nature, Nature, Nature; and they are neither made to fear, or to suspect, that it is the presence and signal of the Almighty one that has come so near to them. The atheism of mere worldly science has deadened and obliterated their sense

of the Divine. A right mind, and a right learning, sees God in everything; and beholds in the commonest ongoings of the universe the manifestations of eternal Power and Godhead, as energetic in character, and as wonderful in results, as the setting up of the stars on high, or the calling forth of the world from its nothingness. It sees in every light that shines from heaven the herald of present Deity, and is ready to fall down in holy reverence at every new signal from the sky, as verily the forthcoming of the almighty Creator and King of the universe, before whom every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, with trembling adoration.

I cannot, therefore, but admire and commend the reverent awe of these unsophisticated shepherds, nor fail to see in it a quality which most of all should show itself in our hearts, under the amazing letting forth of the light and glory of God which shines about us under the tidings of the Gospel. We need to feel and know that there is a God in Nature, and to be filled with adoration at the manifestations of his presence which crowd the creation. But we need especially to know and feel, that it is the same dreadful Majesty that approaches us in the proclamation of the Christ. Brethren, you may call it an invention of human fancy—a work of man—a mere phenomenon in the outworking of superstitious feelings and dreams,—but the Gospel which proclaims to you a Saviour, born at Bethlehem, is verily the outshining of the glory of God, and a message direct

from his eternal throne. Nor are you in a position to take in the full benefit of your exalted privileges, until you have learned to realize this fact, and to bow with trembling reverence at this new wonder in the manifestations of the great Maker, Sustainer, and Judge of all things. The proclamation of the Christ-birth, is the proclamation of God. The light that comes with it, is the light of the glory of God. The bearers of it, are the true messengers of God. And it is for every one to whom it comes to be moved and awed at it, with a holy and reverent adoration, as in the immediate presence of the Almighty himself. For where the Gospel speaks, there God and his angels are.

II. *The shepherds believed what the heavenly messenger told them.* The supernatural illumination which they beheld, the extraordinary character of the vision, the nature of the utterance made to them, and the singing of angels over it, satisfied them on the spot, that there was reality in it. Their ready persuasion in this respect also serves to show how self-evidencing the true Gospel is, to minds that are unprejudiced, and really open to it. Treatises and arguments on the Christian evidences may have their place and mission; but I have sometimes thought that they do more to weaken and encumber conviction and faith, than to beget or strengthen either. When I try to refer to the precise things which induce me to receive the Gospel as true, or endeavor to identify

what it is on which my faith rests, the scientific discussions of the subject scarcely enter into my mind. They belong to a sphere infinitely below what I see and realize in the Gospel itself. No chain of evidences, however perfectly wrought—no syllogistic reasonings—no conclusions of logical deduction—are half so satisfactory to me as the simple and naked story as it stands written in the Scriptures. It is its own best argument. It bears in its own nature, in the effulgence of its own light, in the fitness of the tidings which it utters, in the angelic harmonies which ring in it, in its whole manner and effect with regard to my feelings and thoughts, what, of itself, convinces me that it is a Divine reality, and that the writings which contain it are not of man. These shepherds needed no books on evidences, nor to have the processes analyzed by which to judge of the reasonableness of their conclusions. Nor are such books and analyses necessary for us. We need only to open our eyes and see, and our ears, and hear, and our hearts, to take in and feel, what comes to us in the mere annunciation of the Christ; and if our doubts and scruples are not scattered to the winds, it is because of some guilty prepossession which we are unwilling to surrender, or some selfish malignity which does not deserve to be argued with. It is not evidence that is required, but honesty and simplicity of mind to acknowledge the truth when seen, and to obey it when it is known. Christian faith is not so much an affair of logic, as of morals.

Its obstructions are ethical. Its absence in those to whom the Gospel is faithfully preached, is not the result of the absence of sufficient demonstration, but of the absence of heart and will to be convinced, and to own allegiance to the truth. Hence the criminality which the Scriptures everywhere attach to unbelief. Men have intuition enough on this subject to do away with dialectics. Faith is the gift of God, not the fruit of human induction; and that gift goes along with the proclamation of the Christ, in such way that he who fails in it, fails by reason of his own wilful perverseness. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." John 7:17.

III. *The shepherds diligently improved the light they received.* They were not satisfied with the mere hearing of the newborn Saviour, but must needs go and see what had occurred. No sooner had the angels withdrawn, than "they said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us. And they came with haste." Faith is an active principle. It cannot know of a Saviour and not go in search of him. Accrediting the Divine announcement of the Christ, it wishes to come to him, and rests not until it has found him. No care of flocks, no darkness of night, no carnal consultation, no delay for a more convenient season, is permitted to come in to hinder the prompt

embrace of the first opportunity. Let the impediments be what they may, it will on.

When Demosthenes was asked what was the first great constituent of oratory, he said: *Action.* When asked what was the second, he said: *Action.* When asked what was the third, he again said: *Action.* But in a much higher sense is this true of faith. It is action, action, action, from beginning to end; and there is no true faith without it. People who think they believe the Gospel, but do not earnestly seek the Saviour whom it proclaims, only deceive themselves. A faith too inoperative to move us in life's duties, is certainly too feeble to affect our estate amid the awards of eternity. If it is too faint to set us upon prompt and diligent search for the Christ, and to come into living connection with him now, it is mere folly to suppose that it is able to link us to him, in any availing degree, when we come to stand before the judgment-seat. We never truly believe, till we come to *do* as we believe; "for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2: 26. We must search for the Christ, and come to him, as well as hear the angels tell and sing about him.

It is true, that we have not to go to Bethlehem to find him. People may go there, but it is not necessary for them to go. I have been there, and stood in what is supposed to be the precise spot where the shepherds found him; but he is not there, any more than he is here. He has

long since finished his earthly life, and ascended to the Father. But he has not so withdrawn, as that true faith can no longer find him. There is a most important sense in which he is still here, and in which he has promised to remain unto the end of the world. He is in his word, in his sacraments, in his Church. This is now the Bethlehem to which we must go to seek him. We must search into his word for him. We must come to him in his holy ordinances. We must go into the company and fellowship of his people. We must ask for him in prayer and obedience to his Gospel. And by these means we shall come to him, and have him disclosed to us in all his Divine beauty, and find out how gloriously true is all that the messengers of God have said of him. The three thousand, on the day of Pentecost, came to Christ, when they gladly received Peter's word, and were baptized, "and continued steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The Ethiopian Eunuch came to Christ, when he listened to Philip's exposition of the prophecies, and confessed the faith that was taught him from the Holy Scriptures, and commanded the chariot to stand still, and went down, and received upon him the holy waters of baptism. And Cornelius came to Christ, when he prayed, and sent for the minister of Christ, and was baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And in the same way does true faith ever seek him.

IV. *The shepherds were amply rewarded for their pains.* They found the Saviour whom the angel announced. Coming with haste, they "found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." What the pious of all ages had been waiting for, they now beheld with their own eyes. It was a lowly infant they looked upon, but it was the glorious Christ. Under those swaddling-bands they saw the world's only Redeemer, and him in whom their highest hopes centred. Now they knew of a truth, that God had visited his people, and that the long-delayed redemption was at hand. And how did their hearts glow with reverent enthusiasm and delight! There is no record made of how they felt, but the imagination is stirred to conceive a scene of joy which words cannot describe.

> Tongue cannot express
> The sweet comfort and peace
> Of a soul in its earliest love!

Naturally enough would they tell of what they had seen and heard out in the field,—of the glorious light, of the angelic messenger, of the words he spake, and of the song of the countless multitude in the sky. Naturally enough would they ask and hear what more those modest parents could tell about the matter. And a communion of joy was held around that manger, in that humble grotto, the like of which had never occurred on earth, and of which they had never dreamed. How were the hearts of the shepherds gladdened

and lifted up, and the souls of Joseph and Mary comforted! What heavenly blessedness thrilled in that stable, beyond all that had ever been felt in palace or in temple! It was the song of the angels transferred to human hearts! It was the blessedness of heaven translated into humanity!

And so it is ever, as men receive and obey the Gospel, and search for the Christ whom it proclaims. Earnestly seeking, they also joyfully find. Not in vain will the angels have spoken and sung to them who diligently improve their opportunities. Not in vain hath eternal wisdom said: "Those that seek me early shall find me." Prov. 8:17. Light used, is confirmation gained; faith exercised, is faith established; and the way to Bethlehem in search of Jesus, is the way to blessedness. These shepherds believed the Divine message, and their faith was presently rewarded with happy vision; and their happy vision was the means of still higher faith; and their joy the earnest of yet more exalted anticipations. Nor do people know what comfort and good they are losing by their indifference and inaction with reference to the glad tidings we bring them. They run after earthly shows, and sit or stand a whole day, or even night, for the opportunity of seeing a writer of novels, and spend their time and means to gaze at a mere man of the world, who is likely to go away and make sport of their silliness; but for the joy and satisfaction of seeing the Saviour, and for the abiding bliss and glory which communion with him imparts, they have neither time nor

means! They are ready to listen, and pay, and wait, and put themselves to any inconvenience, to hear a man tell of odd characters and scenes which never have been; but one hour's patient attention to the sublime realities which enlist angelic songs and contemplations, is too much for them; and, to gain access to the presence of the King of kings, and to secure seats with prophets and apostles in the halls of salvation, and to have part in the beatitudes of an eternal heaven, they cannot stir a hand, or move a muscle!

> Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
> To Heaven in supplications sent,
> Their songs of joy should ever be:
> Behold what God hath done for me!

V. *The shepherds, having found the Christ themselves, freely confessed him before the world.* "When they had seen, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." Christianity deals with men as individuals. It comes to each separately. Our responsibilities under it, and all that it proposes to us, are not affected by our relations to others. But man is a social being, and social results must necessarily follow from the intense impulses which faith kindles in the individual soul. Though one cannot believe for another, any more than he can eat or drink for another; still, we are so knit together, that none of us is brought to a knowledge of salvation for himself only. None of us liveth unto himself. And as our existence must needs

affect others, so our personal experiences also have relations, and are meant to have effects, beyond our individual selves. God sends his salvation to us, and works faith in us, as separate beings only; but in thus dealing with us, it is also intended to reach others through us. Accordingly, the very grace which brings us to the glad enjoyment of his favor, impels effort to make others partakers in the same. It thus becomes at once the outward duty and the inward necessity of a man brought to the joyous knowledge of the truth, to make some demonstration looking to the bringing of his fellow-men to a like happy estate. Having received the light, we are to reflect that light, and let it shine, that others may also have the benefit of it.

Hence, no one is considered a complete Christian who does not publicly confess Christ. The constant presumption is, that those who have really found the Christ will openly bear witness for him; and that those who are not willing to be known as believers, do not yet really believe. If we have gone to the manger as the shepherds went, and are assured of having found the Christ as they were assured, it is the law of nature and of grace that we should come away as they came, making known abroad the glad tidings in which they rejoiced. The treasure is too blessed, and the world is too needy, not to reveal and publish the great discovery when once really made. Some may laugh at us, and ridicule us as silly dupes; but knowing whereof we affirm, we must stand

to the truth, and not keep silence concerning it. And sad will be the fate of that man, who inwardly believes in Christ, and knows the truth, yet never gives to his family, his neighbors, his friends, or the public, the benefit of his testimony and example. How dwelleth the love of God in him!

VI. *The shepherds returned to their flocks glorifying God.* True religion was not meant to take men away from the ordinary pursuits of life, but to go with us into them, to consecrate them, and to give us new comforts in them. It is not a thing merely for great occasions, Sundays, and high festivals; but also for our everyday occupations, and our ordinary business. If it calls us betimes to go to Bethlehem, and there feasts our eyes and hearts, it also conducts us back again to our fields, hallowed now by the heavenly things that we have witnessed, sanctified with blessed memories, and transformed into temples of praise and glory to that God who hath visited us with his salvation. Wholesome Christianity has no ascetic orders, no mendicants, no encouragements for those who see only contagion and sin in the common relations and duties of life. Mary at her nursing, Joseph in his care of his family, and the shepherds in attention upon their flocks, are as much the servants and worshippers of God, and as holy and blessed in their estates, as any nun in her virginity, or hermit in his lonely devotions.

When we ask you to become Christians, we do not ask you to forsake your counting-houses or your farms, to vacate your offices or shops, to separate from society or friends, or to lay down your trades and relinquish your duties and places in life. All that we ask in these matters is, that you take Christ and your religious principles with you into your daily walks, and let them temper your behavior, and sweeten your spirit, and dispose and consecrate your toils, trials, and gains to the praise and glory of God. Only be sure that you have found the Saviour, that he is your chief comfort and hope, and that you have no other aim in what engages your attention than to serve and glorify him, and your very desks and counters shall become altars to his praise, and your houses sanctuaries in which his saving benediction reigns.

Kneeling with shepherds at Bethlehem's manger,
Jesus confessing with courage and love,
Humble vocations shall glow with His favor.
Leading to higher employment above.

Happy in Him who hath loved us and bought us,
Rich in the life which He gives to his own,
Filled with the peace passing all understanding,
Ne'er shall we envy the monarch his throne.

In life's plain pathways God's service pursuing,
What are the tremblings and tossings of time?
Light of His glory the darkness illumeth,
Dawn of the daylight of Heaven's bright clime.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Luke 2 : 25–40. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

AS the world reckons time, we are to-day on the verge of the closing year. The Church, in the lesson she has designated, does not fail to allude to the fact. It is true, she keeps her eye upon the infant Saviour,

and points to the marvellous evidences of his sacred Messiahship; but it is in connection with personages in the last period of advanced age, whose earthly years were near their end. Beautiful is the picture. It presents two aged saints, comforted at the close of life with a view of the Christ, whose character and mission they joyfully sing over the nearing grave. Let us inquire, then,

I. WHO AND WHAT WERE THESE PEOPLE?

II. WHAT THEY TESTIFY OF JESUS?

"*And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon.*" This is a name which is nowhere else to be met with in the New Testament. The Scriptures are meagre in their accounts of him to whom it belonged. Tradition, however, has undertaken to supply the deficiency. Some say, he was a priest. Some say, he was the son of Hillel, and the father of Gamaliel, at whose feet Paul was trained. Some say, he was blind, and miraculously received his sight as he took the young Saviour in his arms. Some say, he was a translator of the ancient Scriptures into Greek, and that certain miraculous corrections were once made in his erroneous manuscript, by the hand of God himself. Some say, he never was buried; that the Jews, in their jealousies of his talents, virtues, and testimony to Christ, refused him sepulture; and that his body was conveyed to a chapel in Constantinople, and afterwards to a church in Venice. But these are

doubtful legends, of which we may believe what we like, but on which no reliance can be placed. All that we certainly know of him is contained in the text.

He was a man of faith. He "waited for the Consolation of Israel." It was by this title that the Jews sometimes designated the promised Messiah. They spoke of the years of the Messiah, as "the years of Consolation." One of their most solemn forms of affirmation, was by their hope and desire to see the Consolation of Israel. And as Simeon waited for that Consolation, he was a believer in the promises which foretold the coming Saviour. He studied the prophecies of the future, and believed them, and made their utterances things of practical moment to his soul, and waited and watched for their fulfilment.

As the fruit of this faith, he was "just and devout." He was not one of those with faith without works; nor one of those with morality without piety; nor yet one of still another class, who feign piety without morality. His faith showed itself in practical righteousness, both in relation to man, and in relation to God. Socially, he was "just;" and religiously, he was "devout," —an upright member of the community, and an earnest worshipper of his Maker, — two traits which sum up the highest excellencies of human character.

As the result of the whole, he was extraordinarily favored with influences from heaven. "The Holy Ghost was upon him." The marvellous out-

pouring of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, had not yet occurred. But that Spirit existed, and wrought through the word, and moved and impressed the hearts of the saints, under the Old Testament, as well as under the New. It was then, however, a rarer gift, and, in its higher forms, was principally confined to the prophets. But in cases of special attainment in Divine things, it was vouchsafed in a peculiar manner to many. Among these was Simeon, to whom it was revealed by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Long continuance in special devotion to God, may always count on special favors from the Almighty. The reason we enjoy so little, is because we believe so little, and are so stinted in our consecration.

The other person mentioned is "*one Anna*," of whom we know as little as of Simeon. She is nowhere else brought to our attention in the Scriptures. We are informed, however, that she was "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser;" that she had once been married, and lived with her husband seven years; that she now had been a widow about eighty-four years; and that she was an irreproachable and holy woman.

She was a "prophetess." Her vocation was to instruct the people in divine promises, and to lead in giving praise to God;—an office for which special enlightenment and grace were given her, as to Miriam, and Deborah, and Huldah, of old. She was not properly a Jewess, though an Israel-

ite. The name of her father and her tribe are given to show this fact. Aser's sons were among those who broke off from Judah, and from the worship at Jerusalem, and were carried into captivity, from which very few of them ever returned. But the grace of God is not bound, any more than his word. Among the most unpromising people, God often has sons and daughters, and even holy prophets and prophetesses. This woman came out of Galilee, whence the Jews thought no prophet could arise. Jesus himself came out of Nazareth, though nothing good was ever expected from that place.

She was a lover of God's house. "She departed not from the temple," clinging the closer on account of the defection of her fathers. Her attendance there was constant, as the place, above all others on earth, for near communion with God. Her spirit was the same as that of David, when he said: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Ps. 84: 2, 10.

She was a woman of self-denying piety. She "served God with fastings," mortifying the flesh, and keeping all her bodily appetites in subjection to the one great object of her life. There was no particular merit in her abstemiousness, but it was part of the old ritual, and she doubtless found it helpful to her soul. It showed, at any rate, the deep and earnest sincerity of her piety.

She was also a woman of much devotion. She "served with fastings, *and prayers, night and day.*" As early as the days of Moses, we read of women assembling at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. The ancient paraphrasts say, they came to pray; and the seventy translators say, they came fasting. Thence Anna took the model for her devotions, and esteemed herself happiest in being constant and unfaltering in their performance. She never wearied in her supplications, which seem to have been directed mainly to the speedy fulfilment of the promise concerning the blessed Messiah. Nor is it unworthy of note, that, throughout the Scriptures, the best examples of human sanctity, and of spiritual attainment and grace, invariably connect with devout waiting and watching for a coming Saviour.

Both of these distinguished servants of God were now quite aged. It is specifically recorded of Anna, that "she was of great age." The facts mentioned show, that she must have been over, perhaps considerably over, a hundred years old. Simeon was also far advanced in life. The intimation is, that his departure had been specially delayed beyond the period of mature old age. And so soon as he had seen the infant Saviour, he blessed Joseph and Mary, and spoke as one who was only waiting to be gathered to his fathers. He was the patriarch of that generation, with a patriarch's bearing, and a patriarch's faith. As he moved to and fro upon the errands of his devotion, with silvery locks and uplifted counte-

nance, youth and manhood looked after him with reverence, and childhood paused in its recreations to gaze with pleasing veneration as he passed, and even the criminal and vicious, to whom he was a living reproof, felt his presence as one who deserved their respect, and whom they should sadly miss after he was gone.

Old age always should command our tender sympathy and respect; and the venerableness of years, calmed, soothed, brightened, and animated with the inspirations of well-tried religion, and the hope of a nearing heaven, is as beautiful as it is impressive. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." And I know of no more beautiful life-picture than this of these two patriarchal saints, meeting in the temple of God, in this last extremity of their lives, and seeing there the blessed object of their common faith and prayers for all those long rolling years.

It was not by accident that this holy group was brought together, and that the holiest of earth's living infancy, and the holiest of earth's living age, thus met in God's house. Great purposes and promises were being fulfilled. A virgin had given the world a son. Almighty Deity had become incarnate in feeble infancy. The Redeemer was about to make his sudden appearance in his temple. And those who had lived in such devout hope of his coming, and had prayed so earnestly and so long for the hastening of the gracious promise, and were delaying on earth only to have

a glimpse of him before they died, were remembered in heaven, and led by Divine promptings to be present at the moment, that their fading vision might be cheered with the sight, their pious confidence the better established for their departure, and their venerable and prophetic testimony given to the wondrous babe of Bethlehem. It was one of those beautiful conjunctions, which God only could arrange, in which piety was honored and rewarded, faith answered and strengthened, earth's burdens lightened, the Scriptures fulfilled, the Saviour's Messiahship attested by the most trustworthy and respected, and Joseph and Mary, and all believers of all time, furnished with prophetic words on which to ponder for the direction and improvement of their faith.

II. Let us, then, observe what these venerable worshippers tell us of the child Jesus; for they were detained to see him for us, as well as for themselves. Quite a number of particulars are specified, either of which might well occupy us for the remainder of the time allotted to this service. I can only recount them in the briefest manner.

Simeon proclaims the infant Jesus *the salvation of God.* It was in reference to the promised Messiah, that the dying Jacob said, "I have waited for *thy salvation*, O Lord." God himself had said, concerning that promised one, "I give thee, that thou mayest be *my salvation* unto the end of the earth." Is. 49 : 6. And Isaiah, by prophetic an-

ticipation, sung the same, saying: "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see *the salvation of our God.*" 52:10. And, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the aged Simeon applies these strong, if not the very strongest, Messianic passages to the babe of Bethlehem. We thus have a distinct and inspired testimony, that that very child was really the Christ, to whom the faith and hopes of the pious of all ages had been directed.

The expression itself is also one of particular significance. Jesus is not only the Saviour, but he is *the salvation.* Salvation is in him. He is its author, the fulfiller of its requirements, the accomplisher and the imparter of it. Embracing him, we have it; and apart from him, it does not at all exist. He is *God's* salvation; because he is the salvation which God has prepared and promised, and which God accepts, ratifies, and presents, over against all salvations of man's preparing, devising, or proposing.

There has really, then, been a movement in heaven, and an arrangement in the counsels of eternity, to redeem and save fallen men. Amid all the grand administrations of the eternal throne, there has been a gracious remembrance of our sinful race, and the ordination of an economy of redemption for us, in the person and the hands of Him who was born of Mary in the grotto. Yea, and it was nothing less than God's salvation which came into the world, and was carried to the

temple, and was held in Simeon's arms, in that lowly infant of Bethlehem.

"*A light to lighten the Gentiles;*" or, light for an apocalypse (ἀποκάλυψιν)—a revelation—of the Gentiles. That is, light for the heathen, revealing to them themselves as well as their salvation. As the Jews generally conceived of the Messiah, the Gentiles were not to share his blessings. The popular notion was that of an earthly king, a mighty general, a triumphant Jewish warrior, who should give universal dominion to them, and humble all other people into tributaries and slaves. But we here learn, that nobler views were entertained, in some circles at least. The Lord had given sufficient intimation in the Messianic prophecies, that the salvation he had provided was not only for the house of Jacob, though meant to be introduced through them. Those, therefore, who had looked the deepest into the ancient promises, well saw that the Christ was to be a spiritual Saviour for the race, and that his saving work was intended for all nations, though holding a more immediate relation to Israel. Indeed, Simeon mentions the babe's relation to the Gentiles first, as if to him the more striking and exalted aspect of the Christhood. That the Lord should visit his own chosen people, was a great thing; but that He should extend the blessings of that visitation to the lost and idolatrous heathen, in his mind enhanced the grandeur of the mission, and the adoring wonder he felt toward the child.

He was to be to the Gentiles *Light—light for*

Revelation. What light is, Moses tells us. It is the outspoken Godhead, the uttered Deity. And when the Scriptures say, "God *said*, Let there be light, and there was light," Gen. 1 : 3, that the Christ is Light, as they do in so many places, what is the great underlying thought, but that he is, in the spiritual sphere, what light is in the natural?—to wit, the uttered Godhead, the divine Word embodied, the λογος—the expression of the eternal Father—administering brightness, purity, beauty, life, consciousness, visual power, and joyous blessedness over the dark, dead, chaotic world. The gods of the Gentiles are demons; but the Christ is "the true Light," the apocalypse of genuine Deity, the all-enlightening, quickening, saving, and blessing revelation of the being, mind, power, and grace of the Creator and Preserver of all things. Under these simple words, we thus have an expression of the highest nature, office, and relations of the Christ, opening out into depths of grandeur toward God and toward the world, all ascribed by inspiration to an infant, at whose feet we may well bow down, and wonder, and adore.

"*And the glory of God's people Israel.*" No tribes of earth were ever so highly favored of heaven as the children of Jacob. To them pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Rom. 9 : 4. The sublimest saints of the olden time, and the sublimest national history, were theirs But the sublimest of

all their distinctions was, that "from them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever." Rom. 9:5. It is a strange paradox, but true as strange, that the very man whom the Jews would not allow to live, was he who, by the preparations made for him, and the wonders of his life, was the very jewel in the golden ring of Jewish glory. And it is to the deepest centre of all Judah's greatness, and to the deepest spring of all saintly triumph, to which old Simeon conducts us, when he pronounces that babe of Mary "the glory of God's people Israel."

Still further does he describe that babe as the point on which the destinies of men should turn. His word to the virgin mother was: "Behold *this* — not *child*, for he seems at a loss to know what to call him yet—is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel;"—the fall of some, and the rising of others. As men should deal towards that child, so should their fate be. To those who should fail to appreciate him, — to those who should stumble at his lowliness,—to those who should reject his claims and repudiate his Messiahship,—to those who should not receive him as Simeon did,—he was to be the occasion of a fall, as deep and dreadful as their privileges were exalted;—a fall not only from civil privileges, but from spiritual hopes, and from all prospect of redemption. How fearfully has this prophecy since been fulfilled? But to those who should see beneath his outward humility and meekness

the true divinity of his nature, and acknowledge him as God's anointed salvation, and accept him as their Lord and Saviour, he was to be the occasion and the spring of a rising, from helplessness, degradation, and sin—from condemnation, and beggary, and death—from the lowest depths to which the fall has plunged the race—to godlike excellencies on earth, and to immortal princedom and dominion in the ages to come. Few people may consider it, but the question "*What think ye of Christ?*" is THE QUESTION, the answer to which must decide the destinies of men, as it decided the fate of Jerusalem, carrying them to everlasting ruin, or to eternal glory. Nations must ever rise or fall, and every individual soul be saved or lost forever, just as that mysterious son of Mary is accepted or rejected. This is what Simeon meant, showing a prophetic insight into the whole nature of Christianity which we do well to note.

Still further does he declare the holy child given "for a sign which shall be spoken against." "*A sign*"—a token—a wonder—a prodigy. Such was Christ in his nature, his office, his teachings, his works, his appointments, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and the cause he has set up in the world; yet, in all these particulars he was to be unsatisfactory to the tastes, persuasions, prejudices, and prepossessions of men. He was to be "*spoken against.*" Christ was an offence to the Jews. There was nothing that he did, or said, or left undone, but they perverted it, and reviled him for it, and nursed their antag-

onism till it culminated in his crucifixion. They did the same with reference to his apostles, and the story of their testimony concerning him. And in all nations and ages, neither Christ nor his cause has ever failed to meet with a like treatment. Though the very pledge, proof, and demonstration of God's prodigious and everlasting compassion, around which men and peoples might rally in comfort, peace, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, it has been the order of the day, everywhere and always, for the great body of mankind to make this Son of Mary the mark and butt of their vilest antagonism, vituperation, and abuse. No cause has ever suffered at the hands of the world as the Christian cause; and no people have ever innocently had to bear what Christian people have been made to bear for their very goodness and devotion to the truest interests of humanity. Nor to this day has the offence ceased. There is nothing now on earth, that is hated with a more intense and hearty hatred than pure Christianity. Most men, even in the most Christian communities, are ready to become anything sooner than meek and earnest Christians. And there are people who would as soon see Satan himself come into their houses, if he came in respectable form, as a faithful Christian minister. It is sad that it is so; but such are the facts, fore-announced already by the holy Simeon, when Jesus was as yet but a few days old.

But, with all, Simeon thought it the crowning day of his life—an ample reward for all his long

waiting, and praying, and preparing— which brought to his aged eyes the sight, and to his venerable arms the charge, of this blessed babe. And the patriarchal Anna, sympathizing with his prophetic utterances, joyfully thrilled through all her wilted and tottering frame, and opened her aged lips to speak like words of thankfulness for the child, and to tell "of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Now they could "depart in peace," for their eyes had seen God's salvation.

Nor was this holy joy and peace for them alone. It is also for you and me, and as many as desire it. Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He is God's Salvation, "*prepared before the face of all people.*" None are shut out but those who exclude themselves. What the babe was to these aged saints, he is still to all who are like-minded. With Simeon we may all embrace him as the Lord's salvation, the Gentiles' light, and Israel's glory. With Anna we may look upon him, and have our feebleness roused into prophetic strength, and our torpor into joyous thankfulness. Even to-day he comes again to his temple, borne by the word and sacrament. Here we may enter into his presence, and commune with his body, and feast our souls with his saving glory. And if any would be comforted against failing years and death's terrors, let him draw near, press the holy child to his heart, sing the grateful *nunc dimittis*, and languish into heaven.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Luke 2 : 21. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

ANOTHER year of earth has dragged by us the last link of its slow length. The great wheel of time has performed another revolution. The clock of heaven has struck another hour. Twelve months more have been added to the past, and taken from the time we have to live on earth. The year that has just closed, once was future, and once was ours; but it has now departed, never to return. All the blessings and fears with which it came freighted, and all the sins, mistakes, and misimprovements with which its records have been inscribed, have passed into unchangeable eternity. What we might have done in it, but neglected, must now seek other opportunities. The whole year, with all that pertained to it, is irretrievably gone. No entreaties, no repentance, can recall a single day, or hour, or minute. We may weep over it, and draw motive and argument from it for the future, but we cannot bring back the smallest fragment of it, however wasted or improved. The wheel of ages never moves backward.

Pausing, then, on the summit whence we look back on a year just gone, and forward on another just come in, we find ourselves in a fitting position to commune a little with ourselves and our God.

The text which this day's Gospel sets before us, might be thought quite alien to such an exercise. What, it might be asked, has circumcision to do with meditations on the flight of time? Why come down from so impressive a scene of the living present, to connect our thoughts with an abrogated ceremony of the dead past? And yet, the relation between the two is not so remote as some might think. The idea of the Church is, that we should still keep our eye on the Child of Bethlehem's manger. And on this eighth day from his birth, we see him undergoing a service, which, though obsolete now, was of a nature not unsuggestive of lessons appropriate to a New Year's morning. To some of these I call your attention, wishing and hoping that this New Year's day may be to us a holy circumcision day.

1. *Circumcision was a rite which told of a misimproved past.* The first account of it occurs in the history of Abraham, in whose case Paul says it was given as a sign and seal of the righteousness which is obtained by faith. Rom. 4:11. The state of uncircumcision was thus a state of unrighteousness. Paul also tells the Colossians, that they had been dead in their sins and the uncircumcision of their flesh. Col. 2:13. Circumcision

therefore, carried with it the remembrance and acknowledgment of a bad and unsatisfactory past. It told of alienation from God, and of faithlessnesses and infidelities. It carried with it a retrospect of failure and sin. Even the circumcision of "the holy child Jesus," was an acknowledgment of the fallen condition of the race, with which he identified himself, in its humiliation, that he might become its perfect Saviour. And what should to-day be to us, if not a remembrancer of an unsatisfactory past? Is it not a season for us to pause, and look back, and consider our failures and defects? Can we improve it as we should without making it a time

> To talk with our past hours,
> And ask them what report they've borne to heaven,
> And how they might have borne more welcome news?

And can it be otherwise than that a sad and unsatisfactory balance-sheet shall be the result of such an inventory? With disordered natures, and with the taint of the sin of our first parents upon us, we all have come into the world; and with many lamentable fruits of that common depravity have the paths of each of us through the past year been marked. Most of us have enlisted under the Christian banner, and taken upon ourselves the vows of discipleship and loyalty to our true Saviour and helper; and yet, how poor have been our services, and how many our defections! I doubt not, but the record which even the best of us have made for the year is such, that we

would fain have it amended and improved, if we could. Looking back this day, we are at no loss to find many good intentions unfulfilled, and many sad infirmities and failures, at which shame and dissatisfaction start in our souls as we contemplate them.

And if the best have subjects for regret, how is it with the worst! There be some who entered the past year in careless impenitence, who have carried the same through all its days, and weeks, and months. How unfortunate the retrospect of such! There be some who begun the past year with deep feeling and many serious thoughts and purposes, and have not entirely lost them to this moment, but have permitted another year of grace to go by without bringing them to any thing practical. How melancholy the reflection that nothing better has come of all that seriousness! Nor is there one among us, to whom this New Year is not a reminder of time misimproved, and sin and guilt incurred. It is circumcision day, as it throws back our thoughts in review of a faulty past.

2. *Circumcision was a sign of the cutting off and casting away of sin.* The fleshly incision was a token of a spiritual one, which consisted in separation from moral impurity and evil. Hence the remark of Paul, that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." Rom. 2 : 29. Hence also the allusion of the Lord himself to a circumcision of the heart, to love God,

and to serve him, that eternal life may be ours. Deut. 30 : 6. There was an inward grace, and a moral achievement, linked with this ceremony—a severance from sin and the world. And though the blessed Christ had no sins of his own to put off, yet, as he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and took the place of sinners, it was necessary that he should thus fulfil all righteousness. He was born, and lived, and died on account of sin, and for the putting away of sin; and for the same reason he was circumcised. He was made under the law, that he might redeem helpless and hopeless debtors to the law. And circumcision had the same signification in his case, as in every other. It was the sacrament of severance from sin.

How directly suggestive of what our New Year should be! How does this day call to us, as with a voice from heaven, to put away the evil of our doings, to cast off the unfruitful works of darkness, and to cut from us every impurity of heart and life, that we may not pollute this yet unspotted year with our iniquities! Have we been living in evil and sin? The recurrence of New Year admonishes us that we have carried the matter far enough. The time is here that we should break with Satan and his service, and make an end of bearing his slavish yoke.

Have you been the slave of bad habits? The virgin year pleads with you to throw off the yoke, and lay them aside forever. Have you been hindered in your better convictions by unfavorable

associations? The great Lord of all now calls upon you to break them up. Have you hitherto been numbered with the profane, the intemperate, the lewd, the prayerless, or the unbelieving? The sacred requirement is: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Have you been at variance with your friends or brethren? Have you given place to hard thoughts and bitter feelings toward any of your fellow-men? The message to you this morning is: "Purge out the old leaven of malice"—cleanse your hearts of such unchristlinesses—carry not a resentful spirit into those pure hours which God is showing his willingness to give you. And if any one remembers to-day that his brother has aught against him, let such a one begin this year resolved that the disaffection shall not continue by any faulty stiffness or neglect of his. Sin is a bad thing to have on hand at any time. A man had better part with anything, than keep sin. To get rid of it at any sacrifice, we should consider ourselves happy. And it is especially unpromising to venture upon a new period, laden with sins of which we have not repented. And if there is an appropriate time at which to break off from whatsoever is impure, unlovely, or of ill report, it is just this day of entrance upon the new year. This should be pre-eminently circumcision day—the day for the cutting off and casting away of sin.

3. *But circumcision set apart to obedience, as well as severed from impurity.* It was the ceremony of

initiation into the covenant, and pledged the subject to obey it. It was part of the redemption-work of Christ to obey the law. He accordingly received circumcision as a subject of, and as bound to keep the law. Paul says, "I testify to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." Gal. 5:3. Happily we are now no longer under that law, but under grace. Still, grace also has laws, and brings with it its own economy of obedience, which he who rejects is not a Christian. The requirements of the Gospel are, that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live a life of faith, purity, and love, as the children of God, and the heirs of heaven. We are, indeed, pledged to this in our Baptism, whereby we are as truly marked and bound to Christian obedience, as circumcision marked and bound the Jewish child to the Mosaic ritual. But the outward ceremony needs to become a living and spiritual reality. There must be practical acceptance and exemplification of the obedience implied, if we would reap the advantages covenanted. "We are the circumcision," says Paul, "which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Phil. 3:3. And our New Year is only properly a new year, as it sets us apart, or confirms our consecration to just this new and heavenly obedience. We need to be reminded of our deficiencies, and to put away our sins; but we also need to be transferred and quickened to a new life. A higher law needs to be put into force upon us;—

not a law of bondage to an impossible obedience, but the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes free from the law of sin and death. The provisions for such a renewal and consecration meet us again this day, and call on us with fresh urgency and solemnity now to throw open our hearts, and to receive upon us the true circumcision of the Spirit and worship of God, and of rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

By our own righteousness we never can live. But there is a righteousness of God, all perfect and complete, by which the law is satisfied, and justification freely offered. And the obedience to which we are called, is simply the obedience of submission to the righteousness of God. And why should not this new year find us eagerly accepting it, and forever set apart to it? If the Son of God was willing that New Year should fix upon his sacred body the mark of subjection and obligation to every jot and tittle of a law, which neither we nor our fathers could bear, ought we to be unwilling that it should mark the lifting of our souls into the liberty and peace which now are so freely offered in his name? Oh! what a happy New Year it would be to us—what a very jubilee to our souls—if we were only as willing this day to accept the blessed fruits of Christ's obedience, as he was to submit to the pains and griefs which that obedience entailed on him! Why, then, should any of us let this day pass without having it said of us, as Paul said to the Christians at Colosse: "Ye are complete in

Christ, in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead; and you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all your trespasses." Col. 2 : 10. Why should any of us fail to go into the new year with a new life, marked with a new consecration, and rejoicing in the blessedness of a complete absolution? We may be great sinners, but Christ is a greater Saviour. We may have fallen deeply; but, if we now are willing to part with our sins, condemnation is gone, and we are free, in proportion as we believe it and take the glad tidings to our hearts. We may feel burdened as we survey the past; but it is our privilege to-day to lay that burden down, if we will but give our heart's consent to the obedience of faith. Throw off your gloom and trembling, then, with your unchristliness and sins, and let your fears and sadness be buried with the departed year. Let your souls be cheered, and comforted against dread Sinai's terrors, by the sweet offers of the better covenant. And let this be the circumcision day which sets you apart forever with the free Israel of God.

4. *Circumcision conferred and fixed on Christ his true descriptive name.* That name had been mentioned before his birth. Heavenly messengers

had directed that it should be given him. But it was at the circumcising of the child, according to the custom of the time, and as had occurred in the case of John, that that name was properly given. Then it was that "his name was called JESUS."

There sometimes is much in a name. Nebuchadnezzar must have had some such idea when he gave orders for the alteration of the names of the three Hebrew youths. And it is intimated that God himself doth so regard the matter; else why the change from Abram, and Sarai, and Jacob; or the direction to the prophet what to call his children; or the mission to Joseph to tell him what to call the infant Christ? Histories, prophecies, and vast circles of ideas, are sometimes embodied in a name. In heaven, names are the synonyms of character and office. All divinely given names on earth are thus significant. Nor are we prepared to say that there is not in every case some moral connection, slight though it should be, between a man's character and his name. The mere sound of the word by which one is perpetually addressed, cannot be without its influence. Of this, however, we are certain, that God was very particular as to the name that his Son should wear. His command to Joseph was: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS;" "and he called his name JESUS."

This name comes from a common Hebrew word, signifying *saviour*. It was the name of the son of Nun, who at first was called *Oshea*, to which

Moses prefixed the first syllable of the great name of Jehovah, making it *Jehoshea*, or *Joshua*, which means *Help of Jehovah*, or *Jehovah-Saviour*. And when the Hebrew name *Joshua* passed over into the language of the Greeks, it was pronounced Ἰησοῦς, and hence *Jesus*, retaining, however, its original signification. Christ came to "save his people from their sins." He was also the Jehovah of God—the Divine Christ. Both these ideas were therefore embodied in his name, as an everlasting memorial of his adorable nature and sublime work. His true character was expressed in the very word given as his name;—a word, the mere contemplation of which has been full of comfort and peace to multitudes, and which forms a name that stands out above all other names, and shall stand out ever more conspicuously, till all knees bow to it, and all tongues confess that Jesus the Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And so these recurring New Years are fixing upon us each the final name of our real character and destiny. They are our circumcision days in this, that they are settling on us what we are, and what our eternal fate shall be. They are imparting to us a name, not mere fancy, but solid reality, by which we are measured, and have our standing in the eye of God. That name is for good and blessedness as we are good, and as our hearts are open to the Christ, and to the transforming grace that flows from him; and it is a name for evil and everlasting shame, just as we neglect so

great salvation. Yes, with noiseless softness these days of ours come and go; and with noiseless softness they are distilling upon us their mysterious influences. Indelible also are the impressions which they are making. Eternity can never erase them. Long as the ages roll and our being continues, so long will we have to bear the name and character which these incoming and outgoing New Years are writing upon us. If we are ever to be saints of God, and recognized as his children, these fleeting seasons, by the manner in which we improve them, must decide it. As our New Years call us, so shall we be forever. It is by the recurrence of these that we are getting our eternal names. As they find and leave us, so shall we be eternally,—the ransomed of the Lord, fashioned to his likeness, and monuments of his glorious grace, or reprobates and children of hell, to whom immortality must be an evergreatening curse.

> New Years, friends, are mighty things,
> Beyond the soul's imaginings;
> In them, although we trace it not,
> There crowdeth much of varied lot;
> And much of life, life cannot see,
> Projecting through eternity.

What name, then, is that which this New Year is to give to you? Some name it must give. Some element of character and destiny it must impart. As surely as circumcision day gave to the Son of God the name of JESUS, so surely must this new year give to each of us some name

which can never be recalled. It is a momentous practical question, therefore, which I put: What name shall this new year give you? You have a choice in the case. You may also anticipate what you would like it to be when once these years have ceased to come and go. Some of you have thus far been impenitent, careless, indifferent about God and your souls;—let me ask you whether you are satisfied to remain so forever? Some of you have had serious moments, and have often turned over in your hearts the matter of becoming Christians, but to this hour have procrastinated and delayed decisive action;—are you willing to take this as your permanent estate? Some of you have the vows of discipleship upon you, and on your knees before God's altar have declared yourselves set apart to be his, but have since turned away to unrighteousness, neglecting your duties, your prayers, and the table of your Lord;—are you content to bear this character with you into eternity? What name, then, will you take? If you are not yet fully made up to something better, these are the names which the new year must call you, and which, the chances are, you will have to carry forever. O bethink yourselves, ye candidates for immortality, and see that these years of time be not the occasion of your everlasting disgrace!

5. But, for the encouragement of those who feel their deficiencies and miseries, there is still one other particular connected with the text.

He whom God hath appointed to be our judge, took the name of JESUS. He is a Saviour, and a great one. Hopefully his circumcision day so proclaims him to us. Yea, saith the apostle, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Heb. 7:25. Their sins may be many — their weaknesses may be great — their trials may be severe — their enemies may be mighty — their temptations may be sore — their fears may be full of alarm,—but he is able to save them; and hence, able also to save you. His name is JESUS, and he saveth unto the uttermost. They that take hold on him, take hold of everlasting strength. There are no depths out of which he will not lift them. There are no remains of the fall which he will not cleanse out of them. There are no drawbacks upon their eternal blessedness from which he will not relieve them. And there are no wants or necessities in all eternity against which he will not fully supply them. His office answers to his name. By direction of God they called him JESUS, and by the eternal ordination of God *he is* "JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. 1:21.

To him, therefore, I now and ever direct you. View him, and fly to him as your Saviour. Begin the year in him. He was circumcised for you. He took the name of JESUS for you. He has fulfilled all righteousness for you. And all his great work of love is available for you. Only hide in him.

Be baptized with his name. Be united with his people. Be obedient to his Gospel. In his name live. In his name suffer. In his name die. And when these earthly New Years come no more to you, there remaineth a happier New Year in heaven, whose days shall never shorten, and whose months flow with gladness, like a river without a main.

Not the light that leaves us darker,
Nor the gleams that come and go;
Not the mirth whose end is madness,
Not the joy whose fruit is woe:
Not the notes that die at sunset,
Not the fashion of a day;
But the everlasting beauty,
And the endless melody;—
Heir of glory,
That shall be for thee and me!

EPIPHANY.

MATT. 2 : 1–12. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

WE celebrate to day, what Luther calls "a noble and most comfortable festival"—the Epiphany—the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

Any appearing, or notable manifestation, is an epiphany. Stars have their epiphany, when they

show their light in the sky. Acts 27 : 20. The opening day has its epiphany, when it breaks forth from the morning, and throws its illumination over the world. Luke 1 : 78, 79. The love or grace of God has its epiphany, when it becomes manifest and known to sinful men. Tit. 2 : 11; 3 : 4. And the blessed Saviour is to have his crowning epiphany, when he shall be seen coming again with power and great glory at the end of the present world. 2 Thess. 2 : 8; 1 Tim. 6 : 14; 2 Tim. 1 : 10; 4 : 1, 8; Tit. 2 : 13. And as there were various stages and particulars in the Saviour's earthly life, by which his Messiahship and Divine glory were specially and peculiarly attested, the Church has designated a series of days for their special commemoration, to which she has affixed the name of Epiphany Season, beginning with the sixth day of January. And so remarkable was that Epiphany to which this day's Gospel refers, and so grandly did it set forth the free and plentiful character of Divine grace, that it justly stands at the head of the list of these marvellous manifestations, and well deserves the conspicuous place which has been assigned it in the calendar of our Christian year.

There are four classes of persons here brought to view, all differently situated, and very diversely affected toward the new-born Saviour. First are the "wise men," with but dim information, most earnestly and devoutly seeking the Christ. Next are the scribes and chief priests, full of minute and accurate prophetic knowledge concerning

him, but caring nothing about him. Next is Herod the king, uneasy on his throne at the tidings of this new-born stranger, and hypocritically plotting for his destruction. And last, but not least, Joseph and Mary, with grateful and humble hearts, tenderly and affectionately guarding and rejoicing in the holy treasure which God had given them. But, it would carry us too far to dwell on all of these particularly. We take the first, as the most prominent in the picture, and as the fullest, in the view of the Church, in this festival. Our information concerning them is less minute and definite than might be desired, but it is sufficient to invest the narrative with attractive interest and much precious instruction.

1. *These men were Gentiles.* In this there is a common agreement. A few have suggested that they might have been Israelites from the unrestored ten tribes. But, if such had been the fact, the issue between themselves and the other two tribes would necessarily have led them to inquire for the Saviour under a different title from that of "King of the Jews." On the lips of a Gentile, we can easily comprehend the inquiry as it stands, but in the mouth of an Israelite of the revolted tribes, it would involve an abandonment and condemnation of their most vital and distinguishing characteristic, and so give the whole question against themselves. The air of foreignness, which attaches to these visitors, the character of the presents they brought, the reference to the caste

or profession to which they belonged, their haste to return without tarrying for more general converse, which we would anticipate in people of the same family blood, long separated, and so remarkably brought together, all combine to favor the common belief, held from the earliest Christian ages, that they were *Gentiles*.

Nor need we be surprised at finding such instances of faith, and pious searching, and heavenly illumination, among the heathen, when we call to mind Melchisedec, Jethro, Balaam, Ruth, Job, Hiram, and others of their class. A gracious Providence has so governed the world, that fragments of light and truth have ever been found floating here and there over all the dark sea of time, giving encouragement and hope to such anxious souls as believingly laid hold of them, and looked to God for grace. The great centres of Gentile civilization have always, somehow, been brought into relation with God's witnesses. Hence we find Joseph and Moses in Egypt's court, Jonah in Nineveh, Daniel in Babylon, and, at the time of the advent, the Jews, with their synagogues and Bibles, in all the leading cities of the world. Never has there been such a total abandonment of the nations, as that no possibility of a pure and acceptable piety or faith remained. And these visitors to Bethlehem's manger were the living demonstrations, that not all outside of the chosen race had failed to receive saving light, or to make devout and efficient use of what they had.

2. *These were "wise men"*—not merely men versed in science, and familiar with scholarly learning, but a particular class or caste of learned men—*Magians* (μαγοι). This is a name not unknown to history. Herodotus speaks of a sort of religious tribe or caste of this name, whom he reckons with the Medes (i, 101, 120). Jeremiah speaks of them at a still earlier period, as among the retinue of the King of Chaldea. Nay, even Balaam himself, as far back as the Exodus, may perhaps be justly reckoned as one of the order. They were the sacred prophet-philosophers of their time. They expounded the holy traditions, observed the stars, explained dreams, and claimed to be able to read the destinies of men and peoples. Originally, then, a Magian was a dignified and honored person. Even Daniel, in Babylon, was reckoned as one of the order. At a later period the name came to be applied mainly to cultivators of mysterious arts, star-gazers, fortune-tellers, jugglers, and diviners of all sorts. Hence our English word *magician*, an enchanter, a necromancer, a sorcerer, a practitioner in the black art. Hence, also, we read of "the astrologers, and star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators," Is. 44 : 25; 47 : 13; of "Elymas the sorcerer," Acts 13 : 6, 8; and of "many which used curious or magical arts." Acts 19 : 19. The truth is, that there has ever been a true and a false magic, and some Magians who were really good and Divinely-favored people, whilst others were mere priests of Satan, deceivers, and jugglers. In the higher

sense, all the inspired prophets and priests of God were Magians, whether Jews or Gentiles. And so the Magians, who came to do honor to the infant Saviour, were distinguished and devout priest-astronomers—learned and pious ministers of the purer forms of the old Gentile religion—sage representatives of the lingering relics of the primeval and common worship, which had its last seat and home among the Zoroastrian orders.

It is a truth, which should never be overlooked, that the truest learning and the purest religion invariably go together. They are twin-sisters which cannot be separated, and which always live and flourish under the same roof. God is the centre of all right religion and of all true science. The greatest literary wonder the world has ever seen, is the most sacred book—the book of pure religion. The greatest historian, and legislator, and revelator of the profound facts of nature, that has ever existed, was Moses; and he is at the same time the greatest of all mere human prophets. The wisest and safest councillors of state that have ever given directions for the administration of empire, were such men as Joseph, and Samuel, and Daniel; all pre-eminent in their religious faith and devotion. The most enlightened nations and communities now on the face of the earth, are those most deeply Christian. And the list of those who have contributed the most to the fund of learning, the enlargement of human thought, and the hopeful direction of human life, is mainly made up of names as familiar

in religion as in science. In the Scriptures, wisdom is nothing without piety, and devotion is nothing without knowledge.

Some are foolish enough to assert, that ignorance is the mother of devotion. But it is not so. Ignorance is rather the element of all superstition. The impression has gone abroad in some circles, that the world's greatest thinkers have been infidels and atheists. But it is a false impression. And the very attainments of unbelievers, which some would play off against Christianity, are themselves often the fruits of the very faith which they affect to despise. True religion and true science are as vitally conjoined for the proper health and support of man's spiritual and intellectual life, as oxygen and nitrogen in the atmosphere which supports his animal life. And it is no more safe for religionists to depreciate learning, than for philosophers to disdain humble and confiding religious devotion. It was neither their religion alone, nor their science alone, but the two conjoined, that constituted these visitors of the text "wise men," and that brought them in joyous adoration to the feet of Jesus.

3. *They were "from the east;"* literally, *from the sun-rising.* No particular country is designated. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Baronius, Grotius, and many after them, argue, that they were from Arabia. Origen, and some recent writers, argue, that they were from Mesopotamia, the great seat of Chaldean astrology. And Chrys-

ostom, Theophylact, Calvin, and others, influenced by the historical associations of the word, have been led to consider them as Persians or Parsees, or as having their home somewhere within the boundaries of the old Medo-Persian dominions. It does not matter much which conclusion we take. The material facts remain the same in either case. This, however, is affirmed, that they were from regions east of the land of Palestine, and most likely from quite remote points.

One thing, however, may be intended by this allusion to *the east*. The Magians of the west, the degenerate Jews and others who swarmed over the Roman empire, seem to have been a worthless, pernicious, and degraded class of men. They were impostors, necromancers, and deceivers of the basest sort, cunning, unprincipled, treacherous and profane—mere devil-worshippers, speculators in credulity, and dealers in works of darkness. In them, all traces of the ancient Magian dignity and piety disappear. The Magians of the text were of a different sort. They were "*from the east*"—from a region where the holy and inspired Daniel was once the master and chief of the order, Dan. 5 : 11—from a section of the world where the true wisdom and honest devotion of the proper Magians still existed. It is remarkable, that everything bad in the world, is but the counterfeit, or degenerate perversion, of something good. God made man upright, but he has sought out many despicable inventions. Nor is there a falsehood, or hoary superstition,

but has had some truth going before it, and a more ancient antiquity of excellence, from which it has borrowed its livery. Wisdom, therefore, lies back in the primal purity. To "ask for the old paths," is always the right method for finding "the good way." Magianism, in its original character and home, leads to Christ. Magianism, in its bastard transplantations, withstands God's apostles, perverts his truth, resists all righteousness, and is a veritable "child of the devil." Acts 13 : 8–10.

4. *These Magians were kings*, sheiks, or emirs, the leaders of their tribes. Such honors were certainly attributed to them at a very early date. Isaiah had sung: "Gentiles shall come to thy light, and *kings* to the brightness of thy rising." Is. 60 : 3. The Psalmist had declared: "The *kings* of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the *kings* of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all *kings* shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him." Ps. 72 : 10, 11. In this, Tertullian, and Hilary, and many after them, saw prophetic reference beforehand to what was in a measure fulfilled by these Magians, as the earnest of what still remains to be more perfectly fulfilled hereafter. The kingly character of these visitors they thus considered scripturally established. So also the Church of the middle ages universally believed; and so Christian poetry and painting to this day represent. These Magians certainly were persons of high position in the communities in

which they lived. They had rich wealth to bring. They had time and convenience at command to come. Their entry into Jerusalem was of sufficient state to secure an audience from the king, and the favorable attention of Judah's greatest scribes and highest priests. And the whole tone of Matthew's narrative bespeaks characters of no common rate.

Thus, then, whilst Judea sent only poor shepherds to see and adore the heavenly babe, the despised Gentile world sent its rich and noble to worship at his feet. And so it has been to this day. Christianity has made its greatest conquests among the nations of the uncircumcised. The shepherds came first; and so the earliest Christians were Jews. But, since the days of the apostles, the greatest chiefs and champions of the Christian cause have been of other than Jewish blood and culture; thus verifying another application of the Saviour's words, that the first should be last, and the last first.

5. *They were led by a star.* The exact character of this celestial manifestation is quite as difficult to ascertain, as the particulars concerning those whom it so marvellously influenced. Some say it was a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, in the constellation of the Fishes (a constellation given as the astrological symbol of Judea), which conjunction astronomers affirm took place about the time of the Saviour's birth, the first for more than a thousand years. Others think, it was a

mere meteoric creation, miraculously introduced for the occasion. A third class hold, that it was literally *a star*, which then for the first time made its appearance, and afterwards gradually vanished again from view, as in other instances which men of science have observed. It was certainly fitting, that so glorious an advent on earth should be marked by corresponding sympathy and signs among the stars. There may also be a much more real connection between the motions and relations of the heavenly bodies and the movements of providence and grace among men, than we suppose. Who is prepared to show, that the occurrences in the one have not their attendant counterpart in the other? Great moments in the life and interests of man are everywhere noted in connection with strange and marked manifestations in the life of nature, and especially great crises in the history of the kingdom of God. When Jesus died, the heavens blackened, and the earth quaked. When he shall come again in his glory, "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." "The powers of the heavens shall be shaken," and a great organic transformation is to be wrought upon the earth. And if such wonders in the physical universe accompany other marked epochs in the Saviour's history, why not at his birth, which was the starting-point of all that comes after; even though it should be some new demonstration among the orbs of immensity, or the launching of a new star, beaming with a splendor as marked in the heav-

ens as Christ's advent was eventful on the earth? At any rate, these "masters of the starry lore," were made to see some signal celestial manifestation, by which they were convinced of a blessed advent in Jewry, and prompted to come and lay their adoring acknowledgments at the infant Saviour's feet. And He who scattereth the stars through space like dust from His chariot wheels, and marshals them in their trackless circuits by the word of His power, could be at no loss for methods to furnish, in the largest and most literal sense, a "star" to guide the Magian watchers to the couch of the world's new-born King.

It is to be observed from this marvellous leading, whatever its exact character may have been, how graciously God accommodates himself to the circumstances and particular bent of honest and inquiring men. These Magians were astronomers, and, by profession, consulters of the heavenly orbs for information. But they were devout observers, anxious to know the truth, and willing to obey it. And though the follies of astrology may have mingled somewhat in their studies, God condescended to furnish them a guide to Christ in the very line of their profession. For the star-gazers, he had a star, as for dreamers he often has a dream, and for watchers for omens, a sign, to turn their minds to the truth, in the absence of other means. It would be wrong for us to expect direction of this sort, when we have the clear, full Word at hand; but it would be equally wrong to deny, that God does often interfere for

the good of honest and inquiring souls in the exact lines in which they are accustomed to look for light. Thousands upon thousands of times has it occurred in the history of God's grace, that the very errors and follies of men have been made to speak to them most precious lessons, and been transmuted into channels of Divine Revelation for their peace and salvation. We cannot limit the Holy Spirit, or the power of God; and his mercies, as his judgments, have depths and mysteries past finding out.

But, how came these Magians to connect this star with the birth of a Jewish king? Perhaps, the true explanation dates back to a very remote antiquity. Twelve hundred years before Alexander the Great, eleven hundred years before the age of Pericles, seven hundred years before the founding of Rome, six hundred years before Homer, two hundred years before the Argonautic expedition, while Moses was yet the leader of Israel, and God's people were yet pilgrims in the wilderness, a certain Gentile prophet looked down from the rocks upon their camp, and took up this prophetic parable: "*I shall see him; but not now: I shall behold him; but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion.*" Num. 24:17. He who uttered these words miserably perished for his covetousness and treachery. Ages rolled away—great, eventful ages. But, hidden back in the eastern *terra incognita* were certain reverent sages, among whom the traditions

of his inspired utterances were preserved as the sayings of one of their own order. And when they saw the heavens lit with a new star, they were persuaded that, at last, the star of Balaam's song had come. For that star they had waited and watched, and now it only remained for them to go and offer to him as became his destined greatness.

Nowhere has God left himself without witness. The testimonies concerning His Christ are inwoven with all the great traditions of time. He makes an unwilling prophet utter words from the hills of Moab and Midian, and they go echoing down through the Gentile castes, to yield their blessed fruits after nearly a score of centuries have flown! Well might the royal preacher say, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Ecc. 11:6.

6. *They were further instructed out of the prophets.* It was natural that they should seek Judah's King, in Judah's capital, in the house of Judah's sovereign. But, with all the light the best of heathen have, they need still further illumination. These Magians obtained that further light from Judah's scribes, from Judah's sacred books.

After all, there is nothing to teach men like the written Scriptures. Stars in their courses may combine with traditions to lead willing hearts to the neighborhood of salvation, but the words of

God's chosen prophets must be consulted to discover its exact locality, and to disclose it to the full. We are only too prone to forget what a treasure we have in these blessed oracles. We can dispense with anything on earth better than with our Bibles. In them is light more than the stars can give, and direction beyond all that nature can impart to the truest and devoutest of her sons. Candid philosophy leads Christward. Genuine science prompts in the direction of his saving grace. Nature has grades which point upwards to the spiritual and Divine, and groans and ailments which hint of salvation, and symbolic forms which need but a translator to lay open the highest gracious realities. But all this world's light is mere starlight, till the records of Revelation pour forth their day-beams, and give to nature's guesses the attributes of certainties. The "wise men" were not so wise, but they learned more concerning the object of their search from a few lines of Micah the Morasthite, than from all their studies and observations beside.

7. With this new addition to their knowledge, *their anxious desires were gratified.* Their star was not extinguished or eclipsed by what further they had learned, but only shone the brighter for the intermingling of new beams with its rays. With their faces set for the prophet's "Bethlehem-Ephratah," that same star "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." Fresh and higher joy filled their hearts a-

they looked upon it now. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother."

It was, indeed, but a child they found;—an infant needing and receiving a mother's tender care. It was in an humble place, and in humble array that they found him. But, oh, the thrills of joyful adoration that went through the souls of those venerable men as they gazed on that infant form! They had reached the object of their life-long search and prayers! They had come to look on what the ages sighed after, and all the yearnings of the higher manhood waited for! They had lived to see the greatest miracle of time! "And they fell down and worshipped him!"

There was nothing in the appearance or surroundings of the babe to awaken this reverent emotion, or to excite this adoring gladness. But they had been sufficiently exalted to look with other eyes than with those of mere sense. They beheld in that child a KING, whose empire was to be the undying souls of men, and whose dominion was to enlarge forever throughout earth and heaven. They beheld under that infant form, the letting forth of gracious Divinity into the misruled, disordered, and down-trodden world, to lift it from its degradation, and to subdue it to the everlasting sway of righteousness and peace. Latent beneath those yet imperfectly formed features, they saw the spring of redeeming wisdom and almightiness, which should refashion the ages,

crush out the empire of evil, and reclothe this place of sicknesses, sins, and graves, with the glories of a blessed immortality. To their hearts, he was nothing less than the worshipful Messenger of God.

Nor could they be mistaken in the entertainment of such ideas. Had not their best and holiest traditions affirmed that such a King must come? Had not their reasonings on human need and God's beneficence taught them the same charming likelihood? Had they not found yearnings in their own souls for such a heavenly Prince, which the Spirit of the Almighty had intensified into the force of prophecies? Would great celestial demonstrations, such as they had witnessed, combine with sacred story, mind, and heart, to give confirmation to a mere falsehood and a dream? And withal attested by Judah's sacred books, how could they doubt that in this very child of Mary they were looking on the world's Redeemer-King?

And to prove the depth and fulness of their faith and grateful joy, "when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Oh, the blessedness of an intelligent, rotund, and hearty faith! How it fills, and softens, and expands the soul, and melts down the hardness of our nature into loving deeds of devotion and beneficence! On what embassies of gracious discovery it carries men to their everlasting consolation! How delightfully it collects earth s

treasures, of mind, and heart, and hand, in joyous adoration around the meek Saviour's feet! How it transfigures, and glorifies, and clothes with heavenliness, what otherwise is humble, and earthly, and common! What precious lessons it reads in the stars of the sky, and in the records of time, and in the yearnings of the soul, to make life's journeys easy, and life's attainments holy, and life's close bright with pleasant memories and hopes! Faith sanctifies everything, and levies on all the universe to help our salvation and our joy. Its presence brings near, and gladdens with heavenly communion, those that are far off; whilst its absence banishes into cold and chilly darkness those that are otherwise near. It makes generous, happy, and honored saints even of remote Magians; whilst the want of it leaves favored Judah's priests and king to the sullenness of murderous envy, discomfort, and despair. And a blessed Epiphany shall this be to us, if it does but plant and nourish in our souls something of that living and practical faith which glowed in the hearts of these heathen sages.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid!
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Vainly we offer each ample oblation;
Vainly with gifts would his favor secure:
Richer by far is the heart's adoration;
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

HOLY INNOCENTS.

MATT 2 13–23. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

WE have seen how the incoming of the kingdom of heaven, by the birth of Jesus, affected those who were congenial to it. We have heard how the angels sang, and gave glory to God in the highest, over it;

how the humble shepherds hastened from their fields and flocks to behold what had come to pass at Bethlehem; how the aged, waiting saints in the temple rejoiced over the young child, proclaimed his greatness, and sung prophetic of his mission; and how the men of wisdom from the heathen world came to pay their homage unto him. All these were glad and transporting testimonies to the sublime wonder of the incarnation of the Son of God, and fittingly marked and graced the advent of the world's long-expected Saviour. With admiring rapture our hearts have thrilled as we contemplated them. But a very different story is that which comes before us in the Gospel for this morning.

We celebrate to-day the festival of the Holy Innocents. It is the day marked in the calendar of the Church for the commemoration of the martyrdom of babes, who suffered for Christ, and glorified God in their early death.

The Church distinguishes three sorts of martyrdom: first, martyrdom in will and in fact, as in the case of Stephen, who voluntarily yielded his life for the sake of the Gospel, and was actually slain; second, martyrdom in will but not in fact, as in the case of John the Evangelist, who voluntarily submitted to death for the sake of the Gospel, but had his life miraculously preserved to him; and, third, martyrdom in fact but not in will, as in the case of these infants, whose lives were actually taken on Christ's account, but who themselves had no voice or election in the matter

The narrative of this infamous transaction has been seized upon by rationalists and skeptics as unhistoric and incredible, mainly in view of the fact that we have nowhere any account of it but in this chapter of Matthew. But it is not at all likely that so small a matter, executed quietly, and without any bearing whatever upon the course of political events, even if publicly known, would have found a place in the Annals of Tacitus, or in the histories of Josephus. It is not to be presumed that more than a few dozen infants at most were embraced in the tyrannical slaughter. Bethlehem was a small place, and only very young children were touched. Nor were such proceedings at all uncommon with eastern monarchs, in cases of feared competition for their thrones. The entire desolation which they were not slow to make about them, not sparing even their own kindred, ought to render it easy to believe, that this was not a thing at which such a man as Herod would hesitate. "The man who could put his wife and three of his own sons to death, who made a solitude around him by the slaughter of so many of his friends, who could kill under semblance of sport, as he did, the youthful high priest Aristobulus, who, when he was himself dying by horrible and loathsome diseases, so far from being softened or owning the hand of God which every one else saw therein, could devise such a devilish wickedness as that narrated by Josephus to secure weeping and lamentation at his death, would have had little

scruple in conceiving or carrying out an iniquity such as the sacred historian lays here to his charge." (Trench, *in loc.*) And, apart from all other considerations, as a mere historian, Matthew is altogether as credible an authority upon the subject as Tacitus or Josephus would be. Did he even contradict such a writer as Josephus, I would believe him in preference; and much rather ought he to be believed, when he only states what neither Josephus nor any other historian denies, and what is in no respect unlikely in itself, or unfitting to the known character of him to whom it is ascribed.

It was also to be expected, that the birth of the true King of the world would be noticed with a degree of alarm and resentment on the part of the Dragon, who had by his emissaries usurped its dominion. When Moses, the great humiliator of Pharaoh and his power, was a child, the devil instigated measures for the destruction of his infant being, and caused multitudes of little ones to perish, with a view to defeat what was to come through his sublime ministry. When Abraham, whose seed were to overthrow the empire of Nimrod, was a child, if we are to believe Mahometan and Jewish tradition, he was subjected to like perils. The mythic accounts of the childhood of Cyrus and Romulus represent them as having also been subjected to similar dangers. Nor has there ever been a Hercules who had not to encounter serpents in his cradle. And when Christ, the great Fulfiller of so many historic types

and mythic dreams, came to assail and subvert the falsehoods, usurpations, and potencies which the enemy of God had succeeded in fastening upon the world, it could not be otherwise, but that the Dragon would notice his advent, and make some bloody demonstrations against his infant life. As remarked by Archbishop Trench, "the great strife between light and darkness which runs through all history, had now reached at once its very deepest ground and its highest height. In every other witness for the light, there was something, oftentimes much, of the darkness which he went forth to combat; but here was light in which there was no darkness at all. The whole might and malice of hell must, therefore, array itself against this purest manifestation of the opposing kingdom: and whatever hostility it had put forth against that kingdom of light before, and in its lower forms, must repeat itself with a deadlier intensity now, against its crowning manifestation in the person of the Son of God. In this respect the perils of our Lord's cradle run parallel to those with which his ministry began. Being to destroy the whole kingdom of darkness, he must needs encounter, at the very threshold of his life,—life natural and life spiritual,—the whole concentrated might and malignity of the Evil one."

I. Without entering into all the particulars of this bloody transaction, we may notice, in connection with it, very great opportunities, and very satisfactory information, very perversely em-

ployed. Though Herod was an Edomite, born of a heathen mother, he was not without a knowledge of the prophecies concerning the Christ, or destitute of facilities for ascertaining when and where he was born. The Saviour's advent was very specially brought to his attention by princely savans from the Orient. Their presence in Jerusalem, the subject about which they inquired of him, their testimony respecting the miraculous indications which had moved their journey, and their proposal to worship the babe of which they spoke, if he had had nothing else, sufficiently disclosed to him the whole story. To this was added the further testimony of "the chief priests and scribes of the people," that Bethlehem was the place foretold by the prophets as the Messiah's birthplace. The whole case, in all its particulars, was so distinct and thoroughly made out to him, that no room was left for him to doubt concerning it. As surely as Messiah was to come, that Messiah had now been born, and was to be found within a few miles of the palace. And if any further evidence were needed to prove that Herod's mind was convinced of this, we have it in the profound agitation into which these tidings plunged him. People are not troubled with things which they do not believe; but "when Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." The matter carried with it all the elements of serious reality. He could not treat it with indifference. Unwelcome as it was to him, he was satisfied

there was truth in it, and only too much truth for him. If he had thought it doubtful, though aware that he could maintain no claim to the throne against the Messiah, and though inwardly conscious that he had nothing to hope in the righteous judgment which the Messiah was to introduce, he still would have had some resource against his fears. But so clear and conclusive was the testimony, that even the poor refuge of unbelief was swept away, and he became exceedingly troubled.

It would have been well, however, if this disturbance had softened his heart, and led him to repentance of his crimes, and to humble acknowledgment of the superior claims of the royal babe. There certainly was no absence of light and conviction sufficient for such a result; and this is always the intent of the announcement of the Christ to the children of men. He is made known to us for no other purpose than that we should believe and trust in him. But, conviction is not conversion; and alarm and terror of conscience, is not repentance. His mind was convinced, but his heart was not changed. He knew the truth, but he did not conform himself to it. And it is just at this point that very many fail. It is not that people have doubts about Christianity, or about the character and claims of the Christ. They are persuaded of the truth of the Gospel. Their conviction on this subject is so deep, that they cannot disbelieve if they try. They know Jesus to be the Son of God, and that he has a right to

their homage. Many of the most godless in the community are as clear and orthodox in these respects as the most devout and obedient. And many an hour of uneasiness and trouble does it cost them, when, in the quietude of retirement, or in the sick-chamber, they are brought to serious reflection. It is not light they want, but a disposition to walk in it, and to let the convictions of their heads control their hearts and direct their lives.

Herod even went so far as to assume the profession of a real believer. He listened attentively to what the wise men told him. He diligently consulted the ministers of religion. He searched out the pre-announcements of the prophets. He took careful note of the time when these miraculous intimations commenced. He sent the wise men to Bethlehem, to complete their search, and piously demanded of them to bring him word when they had found the child, that he also might come and worship him. All this was good, and in accordance with the light he had, if only it had been honest. But Herod was a hypocrite. It was not for the sake of the wise men, nor yet to fulfil any pious impulses of his own soul, that he did it. He had no wish for the Christ, and no heart for his worship. The very idea of His presence so excited and disturbed him, that he at once began to plot and purpose to put him out of the way. It was not piety, but murder—not a zeal to do reverence to the Messiah, but to kill him—not loyalty to the Son of God, but treason, regicide, Deicide,—which moved and quickened

him in these seemingly devout expressions. By his pious pretences he freely acknowledged that the case was one which called for attention, interest, and reverent gratitude and homage; but he made them only to further and cloak a most heinous and devilish object. The very light and conviction which should have brought him in lowly adoration with the shepherds and wise men at the infant Saviour's feet, was used and appropriated with a view to destroy that Saviour's life! The very evidences which proved to him that the promised Son of God had come, he turned into the service of hell, the more effectually to strike the dagger into the heart of Israel's proper King, and the world's only hope! Yet, so depraved, malignant and hellish is the soul which refuses to submit itself to God and His truth.

II. We may also notice from this narrative what a miserable, vexatious and treacherous thing is the indulgence of malignant passion and self-seeking. Herod lived only for himself, and the gratification of his own carnal ambition. This was the cause of all his wretched agitation and alarm at the tidings which the wise men brought him. It transmuted one of the most blessed and joyous of messages into an instrument of torture and distress. Though the wise and humble of the earth were glad, and heaven was reverberating with songs, over what had transpired at Bethlehem, it excited only moroseness, fear, and murderous thoughts and feelings in Herod's heart.

He did not like to hear of any king of Israel but himself, though that King should be the very Prince of Peace, and the very Son of God. And this made the tidings of salvation bitter to him, and quenched all the good and wholesome effect of his extraordinary light and clear convictions, and opened the door to the hellish thought of killing the Lord of glory in his cradle, and to the most infamous hypocrisies, in order to accomplish the most malevolent of intentions.

And what terrible vexation did it entail upon him, when he found that the wise men had departed without furnishing him the information for which his blood-thirsty soul was waiting! "When he saw that he was mocked"—that his sinister purposes were frustrated—"by the wise men, he was exceeding wroth." If there had been any right feeling in him, he would have been devoutly grateful at being thus prevented from imbruing his hands in the infant Saviour's blood—that he had been thwarted in the execution of a purpose so satanic in its object, and so infamous in its means. But so great was his malignity, that he was vexed and enraged beyond measure. And his wrath was only the more furious, that God's hand was so manifest in the disappointment. Who but the all-seeing and all-knowing One could know what was under his devout professions? How could such a profound secret, so thoroughly cloaked with pious pretences, be diverted in its aim, except by the special interference of Him who searcheth the heart?

Yet, so stupid, blind, and full of rage was the foiled hypocrite, that he was ready to add the most wanton blasphemy to his murderous hypocrisy, and assumed to make battle with Divine almightiness, to cancel and defeat the very decrees of Heaven. He knew what was prophesied of the Christ; and he could not but see the hand of God stretched out for the full accomplishment of what His prophets had foretold. If he did not believe those prophecies, he was a mere fool in allowing himself to be so troubled about that babe. And if he did believe them, he was a mere fool again, in supposing that his puny rage and power "could dissolve the golden chain of God's predestination." Yet, to this impious and awful attempt did his malignant passion drive him. Another scheme of superabounding cruelty was conceived and undertaken. As God had hindered him from reaching the babe by a distinguishing sword, he resolved to send one which should strike without distinction every babe in the district, and so be sure to put an end to the career of this swaddling competitor for the world's homage and obedience. Accordingly, he "sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her chil-

dren, and would not be comforted, because they are not." A sad, cruel, universal slaughter swept over the whole vicinity of the Saviour's birth-place, which no connivances, protections, friendships, concealments or affections abated, hurrying out of the world the most innocent and the most helpless of the entire population. A wail passed over Bethlehem, where late the song of angels swept,—a wail as if from the tomb of Rachel around which the massacre occurred; a wail over little ones remorselessly given to the despot's sword; a wail which the Church of Jesus has never failed to hear with tender sympathy and emotion even to this day; a wail which, however much it may have gratified Herod's malicious fury, did not ease his conscience, or diminish his miseries, any more than it accomplished his design, or saved him from the terrific consequences of his crimes.

O, that men did but realize to what miseries and nameless crimes they commit themselves by their selfishness and bad passions! There is nothing on earth which they would then avoid and crucify with more assiduity. Well has Jeremy Taylor said: "Ambition is full of distractions; it teems with stratagems, as Rebecca with struggling twins; and is swelled with expectation, as with a tympany. It sleeps sometimes, as the wind in a storm, still and quiet for a moment, that it may burst out into an impetuous blast, till the cordage of the heart-strings crack. It fears when none is nigh, and prevents things which never had

intention, and falls under the inevitability of accidents, which could not be foreseen, or not prevented. It is an infinite labor to make a man's self miserable; and its utmost acquisition is so goodly a purchase, that it makes Herod's days full of sorrow and crime to enjoy the troubles of a three years' reign," and a death at which the world stands aghast.

III. In like manner are we reminded by this narrative of the estate of Christ, and of those who come within his circle, in relation to this present world. He came among men as a feeble infant; and in that helpless form, the mighty ones of earth arrayed themselves against him. "Herod seeks the young child to destroy him." As there was no room for him in the inn, when he was born, so there was no room for him in the realm to live. Hardly had he appeared among men, till their bloody rulers were plotting for his destruction. He was an exile before he was a year old. He was "a man of sorrows" from his earliest childhood. Joseph and Mary had to fly with him under cover of the night, and carry him down into Egypt, to save him from the sword that was whetted to slay him. The rulers and governments of this world are not his friends. Even when they profess to adore him, there is something dangerous under it. If the success of the Gospel depended upon the friendship of princes, it would long since have disappeared. Christ began his life under the ban of worldly empire,

and he ended it on the stake which the state erected. The world cannot abide him. It sought to destroy him in his cradle, it hated him while he lived, and it finally nailed him to the cross. He can hope for no favors from its children. They are of their father the Devil, and his works they will do; and "he was a murderer from the beginning." John 8:44. Christianity is a great tragedy, from its beginning to the end; and the enactors of it are those who are of the world and carry out its spirit. It was so in the case of its great Author, and it is so in all his true members. Whosoever comes within His circle, comes within the circle of suffering. He was not of the world, therefore the world hated him; and because his people are not of the world, but have been chosen out of the world, the world hateth them also. If they were of the world, the world would love them, for the world loveth its own; but because they disown the world, with its falsities and vanities, the world is arrayed against them.

We have before us to-day a picture of feebleness murderously abused. Defenceless women are assailed by the rough hand of armed authority, helpless babes are seized and slain, and the whole town and neighborhood of the Saviour's birthplace is stained with blood and filled with inconsolable wailing. Gentleness suffers, innocence bleeds, and devilish passion revels in resistless authority. It is the prefiguration of the whole earthly career of Jesus, and of his Church. Compared with the great ruling power of the world,

the Saviour was never more than a poor and helpless child. In worldly resources and estate, he was nothing—a mere infant among men. And it is a favorite figure to this day with those whom the world loves to honor, to represent church people as a set of weaklings—infants, women, and weeping mothers—of no account, and to be trampled on without compunction whenever the promptings of ambition or the schemes of worldly self-seeking call for it. And as the Church is to the world but a Bethlehem of mothers and nursing children still, so the world is to the Church a Herod still; and it will never be anything else, till God puts forth his hand of judgment, and smites it with a Herod's death.

IV. But there is another and more comforting presentation in this narrative, which must not be left unnoticed. Though the Christ was but a babe, and murderously sought after by a monster in power, he was not without help. No armies stood up for him to resist Herod's officers, and no wall of fire was thrown round him to consume those who might come against him, and no Ahitophel's genius was called into requisition to outwit the bloody tyrant. But still he was as secure against all the royal rage and enthroned malignity brought against him as he was in those unapproachable heavens whence he had come. Though to human view unconscious, helpless, and unguarded, Heaven was keeping watch, and he who undertook the work of destroying that

babe, undertook a contest with the powers to which all the potencies of earth are but as the small dust upon the balance. The eye of God was on that Holy Child, and saw all that was going on in Herod's heart. He had brought the wise men to furnish the gold and treasures needful for his guardians in their exile, and sent from heaven to advise their timely flight. When Herod's sword came down upon Bethlehem, the infant Saviour was far beyond its reach. Christ is never so weak and helpless, but everything requisite is at hand for the secure ongoing of the Divine purposes centred in him; and however much his Church and people may be permitted to suffer, the cause is always safe, and goes on in spite of the malice of men.

Many infants perished for the sake of the infant Christ. Even this also might as easily have been prevented; but it seemed best unto the great Disposer of all things not to prevent it. It was a sore and bloody affliction, but it had its occasion in a far transcending blessing. Better for the world, and better for these holy innocents themselves ten thousand fold, that they should all thus unconsciously suffer for Christ's sake, than that Christ should never have been born among them. Enough was it for them that the Christ was safe. By his life and achievements there is to them a plentiful and everlasting compensation for what befell them on his account. The sorrowful and abrupt termination of the little day of their earthly lives, had nothing in it of evil to compare with

the blessedness which it secured. A martyr's death is one which the Church of Christ has never ceased to regard as a blessed one. The word of the Master himself is, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Matt. 10 : 39. And when we consider the infinite tenderness of Christ toward little children, how he welcomed them to his arms and pronounced upon them his blessing, how he set them before his hearers as the models of discipleship, and declared that "of such is the kingdom of heaven," we cannot for one moment suppose that the Church has erred in awarding to these murdered babes—murdered on his account—the title of "Holy Innocents." Surely it was not for nothing, even as regarded themselves, that they were thus entangled in the tragic destinies of their Lord. It is not reasonable to suppose that their nearness to him should be availing to bring upon them their baptism of blood, and that the same should not also avail to bring upon them something of the superior grace which is awarded to such a baptism. At any rate, the spirit of the Old Testament saints is represented as tenderly laying their case to heart. Rachel's voice is again heard from her tomb in their behalf. God has caused their memorial to stand prominent in the first book of the holy New Testament. And the sympathy and interest of the Church has flowed for them for eighteen hundred years, still flows, and will continue to flow, as for her early dead, whom she cannot but pronounce pre-eminently blessed of their class.

Let us learn, then, not to be unduly alarmed for the Ark of the Lord. Jesus in his cradle is mightier than Herod on his throne. He is forever safe. No power of earth can vanquish him or his cause. If he suffers, it is because that suffering is part of his work; and what is more than his work requires, or whatever would damage or hinder that work, he is ever beyond the reach of. A persecuted babe, an infant exile, a crucified Nazarene, he is nevertheless and always the victorious Saviour of them that believe. Kings and rulers of the earth may covenant together for his overthrow, but He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at them, and presently dashes them in pieces like a potter's vessel, and, on the holy hill of Zion, sets up his Son as Lord and King forever.

Let us learn, also, not to be unduly grieved at our losses and sufferings for his sake. Though our treasures be taken, or we ourselves fall, the work cannot be stopped. The advocate dies, but the cause survives. No investments, no sacrifices, no pains for God and his truth can fail of their end. So long as the Christ is safe, the cause is safe, and all that we have put into it is safe. If only the work of the Christ goes on, the cross is the stairway to the throne, and our light affliction, which endureth but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The word of the Lord, which standeth forever, says: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or

mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Matt. 19: 29.

And finally, let us learn the importance of having our children in close relation to Christ. It may bring upon them the superfluous cruelty of enthroned wickedness, but it is nevertheless the place of honor, and the place of their enrolment with the saints of God, in case of their early death. Bethlehem's babes might have been saved their martyrdom by being further away from the Saviour; but then we would not be celebrating their celestial coronation, and they would have shared the common doom of their unbelieving countrymen. Though unconsciously brought near to Christ, they as unconsciously became the firstlings of that holy martyr band, whose destiny it is to walk with him in white, and to share his everlasting glory. And as the Master himself hath said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," let us see to it, that our little ones, with ourselves, are brought into holy nearness to him, marked with his name, sealed with his Holy Spirit of promise, and made heirs of the blessed world to come.

Father, our children keep!
We know not what is coming on the earth;
Beneath the shadow of Thy heavenly wing,
O, keep them, keep them, Thou who gav'st them birth.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

LUKE 2 : 41–52. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

THE facts recounted in this morning's Gospel are somewhat remarkable, as furnishing nearly all we know of the blessed Jesus for twelve years after what we had before us last, and for about eighteen years more.

The Gospel records, though full enough for their purpose, are only fragmentary. The evangelists have not given us half the details of our

Saviour's life. John 21 : 25. Their object was to give the proofs of his Messiahship, the substance of his instructions, the facts of his official work, and the outlines of his wonderful person and character. This required no entrance upon the ordinary particulars of his years of privacy. They tell of his birth, the prodigies by which it was signalled to the world both Jewish and Gentile, and the completeness with which everything fitted to the previous predictions of the prophets. They tell how his life was sought after by wicked men as soon as it was manifested, how he was delivered by a heaven-prompted flight of his parents into Egypt, how the babes of Bethlehem were savagely slaughtered on his innocent account, and how he was brought back and domiciled at Nazareth. They tell that "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom," and that the grace of God was upon him. But there they stop. Twelve years intervene, and scarcely another word is given, till we come to the little oasis of the text. And then nearly a score of years is added, in which the records are equally scanty.

But what God has seen fit to leave out of *his* records, men in their folly have tried to supply in theirs. Christianity had not been long in the world, until various writings appeared, claiming to give the minutest particulars of the Saviour's childhood. They are still extant, and may be found, in English, published under the title of The Apocryphal New Testament. But they abound in such puerile fancies, and make the

whole childhood and youth of Jesus such a continuous scene of unexampled, ridiculous and unchristly wonders, that the Church has always rejected them as utterly untrustworthy. They are mere collections of unaccountable stories, which originated in an age, and among a people, ignorant, credulous, curious, and by no means dainty in the reception of what might seem to fill the wide gaps in the evangelical narratives of our blessed Saviour's life. I know of no one who pretends to believe or defend them as of any historical worth, except to show us what sort of an account of the Christ we should have had if men had simply been left to themselves in making these records, and thus to quicken our gratitude that God has given and preserved those dignified, unadorned, sober and self-evidencing narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which have well stood the criticisms of ages, and in the reception of which we feel thoroughly convinced that we are planted upon the solid rock of unmistakable historic verity.

I. Let us inquire a little into the particulars which the Scriptures give touching those intervals in the Saviour's life to which I have alluded.

1. Those years were all spent at Nazareth. Matthew records, that, upon the return from Egypt, which was soon after Herod's death, "he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the pro-

phets, He shall be called a Nazarene." Matt. 2 : 23. Luke concludes his account of Christ's presentation in the temple "to do for him after the custom of the law," by stating that when his parents "had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth." Luke 2 : 39. So in the text, when he was twelve years old, we find him residing still at this same place. And so, after the lapse of about thirty years of his life, and he had already entered on his public ministry, we find him in the vicinity of this same town, and the Nazarenes, with mingled surprise and resentment, inquiring: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Judah and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." Mark 6 : 1–4. These, with a few other allusions to the subject, are quite conclusive, and certify us that the whole private life of the Saviour, after the short exile of his earliest infancy, was spent at Nazareth.

This was one of the humblest villages of Zebulon, situated about half-way between the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, and about twenty-five miles from either shore. It numbers now a population of about three thousand souls, and is larger and more thrifty than it has ever been in all its past history. I have been there, and surveyed all its surroundings in the

clear light of a bright November morning, and can speak from personal knowledge of its features. It lies against the steep eastern slope of a high hill, amid a congregation of small abrupt mountains. It is hidden away in a narrow and deep valley, inclosed on all sides with precipitous mounts, with a close rugged gorge leading in to it from the great plain of Esdraelon. With its substantial-looking houses, terraced along the steep hillside, among cliffs of rocks and lines of enormous cactuses, and here and there overtopped by the tall tapering forms of some dark green cypresses, it presents a pleasant sight as approached from the white hills on the east. Ascending the mount against which it leans, and taking our stand on the top of the Moslem sepulchre which now crowns it, we have in full view the village itself, and all the region round about. Turning our faces to the east, close on our right sweeps the vast level plain of Esdraelon, stretching, like a great belt, across the land, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, with the lesser Hermon, the Gilboa of the history of Saul, springing like some massive ornament from its centre, and guiding the eye out over Jezreel and the mountains of Samaria on the south. Directly in front of us, some ten miles distant, stands the high truncated cone of Tabor, one of the most conspicuous and celebrated of Israel's mountains, whither the army of Barak and Deborah betook itself when it came forth against Sisera, and overwhelmed his hosts at Kishon. A little fur-

ther northward, behind varied groups of mountains, like some bright Saul of Kish, looks down the summit of the great Hermon, with his white locks of perpetual snow streaking his bald brows. A little further to the left, and not so remote, appear the Horns of Hattin, where the ferocious Saladin crushed out the army of the crusaders. Turning to the west, we look upon the forelands of Carmel, and beyond them rises Carmel itself, and over the blue summit of distant hilltops spreads in glittering beauty the liquid mirror of the broad Mediterranean. A greater variety, or a more interesting combination of natural features, all inwoven with some of the most interesting facts of Scriptural history, could not well be found, than that which the eye sweeps over in looking around from that high summit. And on its steep eastern declivity, amid this sublime series of surroundings, clinging like a loving child to the massive hill, and shrinking away as from some stern contempt into a mountainous retirement, as peculiar as it is beautiful, is the humble town of Nazareth.

It was here that Jesus lived, and grew to manhood, and spent the greatest portion of his earthly years. Here is still the fountain from which he drank—the only one in Nazareth. In these very valleys, and on these very hillsides, he strolled, and played, and meditated upon the works of God, and communed with that nature which the hand of his own Godhead had made, and conned over the histories connected with these

impressive localities. Often he stood upon these very heights. Often he looked upon these very objects. All these streets and pathways were trodden by his sacred feet. And wherever we move about this spot, we cross ground which many a time vibrated beneath his holy steps.

It is an interesting inquiry, what influence the natural scenes familiar in childhood and youth have in giving shade and coloring to the character and qualities of a man. That there is some impress imparted in this way can hardly be doubted. All are largely the creatures of circumstances; and the objects whose images are in constant view while life is yet in process of formation, cannot be entirely powerless. And was there no connection between the Saviour's wonderful meekness and the humbleness and bad repute of the town in which he was reared? Was there no hidden link between the sublime elevation, dignity, and grandeur of soul which he evinced in after life, and this congregation of mountains? no relation between his calm and placid greatness and this broad plain, and yonder outstretched sea? no untold intensifying of his philanthropic beneficence from that near-lying field of so many dreadful battles? Had his human spirit caught no secret inspirations for his work of the world's uplifting, from this very watch-tower of nature against which the town he grew up in reposes? Was there no widening and opening of his human thought and soul, and no harmonizing of his human heart to his glori-

ous destiny, from his youthful contemplations of Hermon in his mantle of heavenly purity glittering in the brilliancy of Syria's sun, and of yon boundless expanse of majestic waters? Here, at any rate, and amid these very scenes and sublime surroundings, God chose that our Redeemer should be reared and matured for his glorious work. Even to the cross upon which he died, was nailed the record, written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, that he was "of Nazareth."

2. Peter, in his speech to the persecuting councillors of Jerusalem, uses an expression which throws some little reflective light upon the character of the Saviour's childhood. He is there styled God's "*holy child Jesus.*" Acts 4:27. Even ordinary childhood images more of heavenliness than anything else, perhaps, on earth. Its simplicity, grace, innocence and beauty associate themselves, by a sort of intuition, with the excellencies of angels and a better world. But when we come to invest it with the additional halo of spiritual sanctity expressed by these words, we can present to ourselves no other picture than that of uncorrupted youthful innocence, purity, loveliness, and heavenly grace. Conceiving of the child Jesus as a "holy child," we must needs regard him as the most precious of children, endearing himself to the virtuous and good as no other youth ever did, or ever could. Beauty was upon him, and grace, and goodness, doubtless to an unexampled degree.

3. The concluding words of the text also throw some light upon the general tenor of the unwritten facts of the Saviour's youth. It is here said, that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." With all the mysteries of his Divine person, he still had a complete human nature, faultless indeed from the beginning, but not perfect at once in degree of development. He had to grow in body. He had to strengthen in mind. He had to expand in the ordinary method of that nature in which he had become incarnated. He had to meet all its natural conditions, and to pass through all its usual processes of conquering and building its way from helpless infancy to the powers and qualities of a full and masterly manhood. Picture-makers put a visible halo round his head. It is a mere dream of human art. It was not so in reality. He was among men, but they knew him not. He was a babe like other babes. He grew as other children grow. He was not a child in years, and a man or angel in attainments; but a real and true son of man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, learning life's lessons and developing for life's duties, according to the same laws which hold in case of all of woman born. It was by gradual steps that he advanced to the sphere of his sublime commission, and awoke to the living consciousness of his relations, whether of earth or of heaven. His favor with men had to be won by degrees, as his life worked itself out; and his favor with God was not such a foregone thing, but that he

had to achieve it in real and practical exemplification in human life of those virtues on which such favor depends. The power of will and self-mastery was evolved and wrought into moral solidity in him, according to the same law by which these items of strength of spirit come to have existence in other men. Knowledge and wisdom were not dropped upon him as from the air he breathed, nor yet merely inborn from his Divine sonship, but formed by the like process that knowledge and wisdom have ever come to be attributes of men. In other words, he passed through a true human childhood to a true human manhood, maintaining a true human sanctity and fidelity in all the relations and necessities of a true human life. As one of the older fathers expresses it, he came, "not disdaining, nor going in a way above, human nature; nor breaking in his own person the law which he had set for mankind; but sanctifying every age by the likeness it bears to him. For he came to save all men by himself,—all, I mean, who are by him born again unto God,—infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and those of older age. Therefore he went through the several ages; for the sake of infants being made an infant, sanctifying infancy; to little ones he was a little one, sanctifying that age, and giving an example of godliness, righteousness, and dutiful subjection." (Irenæus, lib. 2, cap. 39.)

II. But let us now direct our attention more

particularly to the youthful Saviour's visit to the temple, as narrated in this day's Gospel.

1. It appears from this record, that his parents were punctual and regular in their attendance upon the appointed services of religion. They were poor. They also lived very far away. By actual experiment, I found it two days and a half hard riding, upon active horses, from Nazareth to Jerusalem. But they found no excuse in these things for failing to be present in the holy city when the feast of the Passover came round. There are people who lay very little stress upon this church going, and are ready to excuse themselves on very slight grounds. Many think they can occupy themselves quite as profitably in their own private homes. They tell us that religion is at any rate a thing of the heart and spirit, and that these outward observances, ceremonies, and assemblies are of very indifferent account. Let such learn a lesson from these holy people. Though they had Jesus in their house with them all the time, they still felt it important, as it doubtless was, that they should not forego the inconvenience and expense of meeting regularly with their brethren at the time and place appointed for the united celebration of the holy services of their religion.

2. It appears that, as soon as Jesus had reached his twelfth year, these pious parents took him with them on their annual visit to the sacred city

and temple. It is not said whether they had any distinct object in this. Perhaps it was the mere custom for pious Jews to take boys at that age with them to the general festivals. Perhaps there was the mingled motive of pious desire with reference to the child, and of a wish to gratify an inquiring lad whose interest ran largely on religious topics. At any rate, they took him with them, an example which it would be well for all parents to note and follow.

3. It appears that this visit of the young Saviour to the holy city and temple was the means of an enlarged and astonishing spiritual awakening to him. Mind left to itself stagnates and fails of proper fruitfulness. There needs to be contact with something to stir it up, and fire it with inquiry, and give it stimulation in order to its full activity. The quickening spark needs to be applied to kindle it into living flame and power. It is from such moments of electrifying awakenment, that life and character take their bent and complexion. Such a moment was that to Augustine, when he heard the voice saying: *Arise and read.* It roused him to consciousness of a new world, started him upon a new mental track, and was the commencement of a new spiritual life. Such a moment was that to the young Luther, when the terrifying thunders of a rainstorm flashed on his soul the realities of a coming judgment. And somewhat such a moment was that to the young Jesus when he set foot within Jeru-

salem's gates, met with Judah's sages, and looked and listened for the first time to the grand ceremonies of the ancient ritual. He had come from Nazareth's quiet valley, from association with minds proverbially low, to the great capitol of his country, to view the living monuments of his people's pride and glory, and to feel the attrition of the most cultivated Jewish minds. He had come to the heart and centre of all the glorious history and appointments of the ancient Scriptures. New subjects were thrown in upon his human intellect. A new world opened to his soul and seized upon his heart, already in holy and peaceful harmony with the deepest underlying Spirit of all. And it was then and there that the national calling and hopes, and divine endowments of Israel, first took possession of his youthful imagination, as man, and quickened his spotless soul into living consciousness of a Father in heaven, and a business of faith and devotion on earth. It was not a conversion, for he needed no converting. It was not the implantation of the new life; for he never was dead to holy things. But it was the opening of his human faculties, the quickening of their activities, to grasp the objects which were to fill and enlist his powers, which marked the commencement of that higher consciousness and ampler realization of the truth, in meek and zealous obedience to which he from that time forward went forth, and which was the active principle of all his subsequent life and deeds as the Redeemer of the world.

It wrought for him an experience, and an absorbing enlistment in spiritual affairs, which divided off his deliberative and self-determining manhood from his pliant and passive infancy, and imparted to his holy energies a calm and heavenly impulse, which carried his immediate interest away from parents, home, travel, companions, everything, but the great matters of his Father's business, now realized as previous infancy could not realize. Hence his seeking unto the doctors, his inquiries of those whose office it was to expound the truth, and his absorbing interlocution with the wisest ministers of the Hebrew faith, that he might possess himself fully of the new world of thought and interest involved. And so fully was his pure heart in harmony with the high things which there dawned on his youthful mind, that there appeared at once such a breadth, penetration, and accuracy of conception, that "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers."

Brethren, will any one look these facts in the face and say, that there is no use for children to come to the temple of God! I know of a boy, who, at fourteen years of age, walked a series of miles from his home, to a strange place, to see a synodical convention. He started out in the morning, and returned at night, without partaking of a meal during his absence, and repeated the same on the day following. And from what he saw and heard during those two days, there was formed in his heart the purpose to devote

himself to the Gospel ministry. That purpose he also carried into effect, against the dissuasion of his bishop, the disapprobation of his father, and all the disadvantages of the absence of pecuniary resources. That contact with the assembled ministers of the Church, brought about by no particular object save to gratify a general desire for information, and without having spoken a word to any of them, touched a cord, and awoke a feeling, which gave shape and direction to his whole after life. And that boy is your preacher to-day! Nor can you know what living seeds of transforming power, and fruitfulness in virtue and grace, may be planted by a single visit of a youth to the temple of God! See to it, then, that your children are early brought into connection with all the ministrations of the sanctuary.

4. It also appears from this record, that even the pious Joseph and Mary expected much less from this carrying of the youthful Jesus to the temple, than actually occurred. They knew him well, and were fully conscious of his goodness and excellence as a child, but they seem to have had not the remotest suspicion of the profound enlistment in holy things which this visit had awakened. They had noticed his absence from them when they were about to depart for their home, but their solution of it was that he had gone on with his companions and kinsfolk, more interested in them and the excitements of the journey than in the high things of religion and duty. So

fully had this feeling settled itself upon them, that they went "a day's journey" without having any other thought on the subject. And when they came to the tarrying-place for the night, and found that Jesus was not where they supposed him to be, their perplexity was without relief, which it would have found, had they for a moment dreamed of the facts in the case. And even after they returned to the city, days and nights were spent in sorrowful searching everywhere, before they thought to look for him among the inquirers in the temple. Ah yes, there is often more going on in the hearts of children than their parents, who know them best, suppose or believe. Even under the gay and seemingly trivial exterior, there may be outgoings of thought, and exercises of seriousness, and forming purposes of life, and openings of heart to the Divine and holy, which have not entered into the remotest parental suspicion. The purest waters are those that run deepest under ground, before they show themselves; and there may be much more in our children, and in the very line of our most anxious desires, than we would for a moment think of ascribing to them. Nay, the very things in which they may seem to us the most unsatisfactory, may be to them the moulds and fashioning points of future lives of usefulness and greatness. Mary was in a mood to chide the youthful Saviour for conduct which had occasioned her so much mental anxiety and trouble. She also expressed this in the words which she addressed to him. But after all, he

was engaged in the very line of his highest duty. He was about his Father's business. His young mind was grappling with problems which he needed to master for the high office which he was to fill. He was even then exercised by a deeper and higher spiritual earnestness than that which had brought his parents to the feast. From this we may learn at the same time a lesson of caution and forbearance toward our children, and a lesson of comfort and confidence after having done our duty in bringing them to the temple.

5. Finally, it appears from this record, what that was which from earliest youth most powerfully absorbed Christ's feelings and attention, and what in his view is the proper thing supremely to enlist and engage the young. In explanation of what seemed to his mother so unsatisfactory, he said, perhaps with a slight tinge of just reproof, certainly with a just indication of the right of the case: "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He had relations in heaven paramount to all relations of kindred and blood on earth. And he had duties growing out of those relations which were to take precedence of all other duties. As devout people, Mary and Joseph should have known this. They should also have expected that a child of prophecy and promise who was to fulfil all righteousness, such as they knew him to be, would not be indifferent to the high things which ought to enlist all children at his age.

These words, then, the first that Jesus ever uttered that have come down to us, show what he practically and properly esteemed the paramount duty of all young people. Every human being that comes into life has a Father in heaven, and a business of that heavenly Father in connection with the temple, to which it is every one's highest obligation and interest to attend at once. And the sooner and the more powerfully any one is awakened and moved to give heed to that business, the more will he be like Jesus, and the more hopeful will be his life and his immortality. Until people are thus awakened and moved, though old as Methuselah in years, they are nothing but babes, unborn as yet into the true world of spiritual life and proper manhood. God's requirement of every one is, "*My son, give me thy heart.*" When but twelve years old, Jesus heard that call, and set himself to comply, with an ardor of inquiry and an earnestness of devotion which rose high above every consideration that this world could suggest. How far, then, my young friends, have you been like the blessed Saviour? Remember that he hath left us this example that we might follow his steps. How far, then, have you followed them? What has been your interest in the temple and in the holy teachings of its ministers? What have you been thinking of your heavenly Father, and of that important business of his, to attend to which he has placed you here? Have you ever thought at all of these matters? Or, have they been to you

as a mere song, neither understood, nor starting any warmth of interest on the subject? Has it ever entered into your heart, that you have a Father in heaven from whom you have your being, and to whom you are bound as to no one else? Has it ever occurred to you what you are in the world for? what your proper business in this world is? and what is to come of the manner in which you set yourself to that business or neglect it? You believe that Jesus was good. You cannot but agree that to be like him would be a desirable and blessed thing. Here then is a point in which you can be like him. You have been brought again and again to the temple. You have seen and heard God's ministers, and been in attendance upon the services of God's house. You can open your heart to the truth. You can inquire and learn whatsoever you need to have made plainer to you. You are twelve years old, and older. The time is here for you to commence your interest and concern about your heavenly Father's business. No shrinking back or worldly excuses can relieve you from your solemn obligations.

And now on this the day that commemorates your Saviour's serious and earnest consecration of his youthful self to his heavenly Father's service, may I not ask you to imitate his example, and to do the same for yourself? God means that you should do it. He has appointed the services and ministrations of his house, and brought you to see and hear them for this very purpose.

And His all-seeing eye is on you to observe how you deal with these precious mercies. Will you not, then, at least think of these things, even if you have never thought of them before? Will you not take to heart the copy which your youthful Saviour has set for you? Will you not henceforward try to be like him? Can you find it in your conscience to let this impressive lesson go unheeded? O, let me beseech you, by the mercies of God, and prevail upon you now, without any further delay, to set yourself about your heavenly Father's business, to present your body a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. The Lord grant that this day—this commemoration day of the youthful Saviour's piety—may also be the day of *your* earnest and unchangeable consecration to Him who made you, and redeemed you with his blood!

In duties, and in sufferings too,
Thy path, my Lord, I'd trace;
As thou hast done, so would I do,
Depending on thy grace.

Inflamed with zeal, 'twas thy delight
To do thy Father's will;
O, may that zeal my soul excite
Thy precepts to fulfil!

Unsullied meekness, truth, and love,
Through all thy conduct shine;
O, may my whole deportment prove
A copy, Lord, of thine!

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

JOHN 2: 1–11. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

WE have here a true Epiphany text. It is a record of the manifestation of the Saviour's glory. It tells the story of the beginning of the miracles which Jesus did. And as it recounts what is specifically given as the first of Christ's miracles, it authoritatively sets aside, as spurious and apocryphal, all that series of unmeaning wonders narrated in the pretended Gospels of the Infancy.

It also suggests an illustration of the Saviour's greatness, which is not often considered, and

which only appears as we look back from those sublime exercises of power which marked his last years. Indeed, I am at a loss at which to wonder most: the grandeur of his miracles, or the calm, humble, patient reserve and repression, for so many years, of a power so marvellous. Had he been a mere man, there would have been no such long concealment of such potencies, and the confinement of their exercise, for thirty years, to the plain every-day acts of an humble and laborious life. Nothing but a real, supernatural, and Divine greatness could ever have so commanded itself against all promptings and temptations, and so meekly abided its time without once giving token of its presence. We wonder at the miracles, and yet so many years of the absence of miracles, where such miraculous power resided, is really the greatest miracle of all. The others were miracles of moments; this was a miracle of many, many years. Christ was himself the crowning miracle of earth. There can be no logical or consistent view of any part of his life which refuses to regard it as a wonder throughout—as the very God himself manifested in human flesh. From his manger to his grave, there was in him the glory and power of indwelling Godhead. And its concealment for so long, or its exercise only in the most ordinary duties of life for so many years, is as striking and impressive as its final manifestations, when his hour had come.

> O, self-restraint, passing all human thought,
> To have all power, and be as having none!

The Saviour's miracles arrange themselves under three general classes: Miracles of nature, Miracles of man, and Miracles of the spirit-world. They thus cover the whole sphere of human interest and contemplation. They admit also of other classifications, as Miracles of power, Miracles of providence, Miracles of faith, Miracles of intercession, Miracles of love, and Miracles of antagonism. One group of them presents us with works of dominion, in which dumb nature yields again to a man the acknowledgments of his sovereignty. Another group presents us with embodiments of healing love and mercy, in which suffering man begins to taste the commencement of blissful restoration. And another group presents us with works of judgment, in which the kingdom of darkness shakes with the consciousness of coming discomfiture and ruin.

The miracles are not mere attestations of Divine power in Christ, but also manifestations of the nature of his mission and religion—demonstrative illustrations of the work which he has undertaken, and engaged to accomplish for the world. It was by these that he "manifested forth his glory;"—not merely the glory of a superhuman being, but the glory of his Messiahship—enactments and earnests, on a limited scale, in advance of the ultimate results of his blessed mission.

Viewed in this light, this first miracle was an appropriate and significant introduction to all the rest. It struck the key-note of the whole work of grace. It was the pregnant type of Christ's

entire ministry—the auspicious inauguration of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God—the prelibation of the great marriage festival yet to come. That turning of water into wine was the enunciation of a new Divine energy, which had found an advent among men, and which was silently working for their good. It was a token of the presence of One who gives when he receives, and entertains and blesses where he is a welcome guest. It was a symptomatic manifestation of a power by which all springs of human joy were about to be ennobled, and the remembrancers of sorrow transmuted into the wine of eternal gladness.

I. *It was a Miracle*—not only (*miraculum*—*θαυμα*) *a strange thing*, or something so far out of the common line as merely to excite surprise, attention, and wonder; but (*σημεῖον*) a mark, sign, or attestation, in which there was manifested an intervention of power above and beyond the mere ordinary forces of nature. The substance of the wonder was, the transmutation of water into wine, in the space of a moment. We thus get a view of the character of what we call *miracles*. They are not contradictions of nature; for it is not contrary to nature for water to be made into wine. That is a thing which is going on in a thousand places every summer. Nor yet are they suspensions of nature's laws; for those laws still remained and continued in force while this miracle was being performed, the same as at any other

time. Miracles are merely the exercise of ordinary powers in extraordinary methods—the bringing about of results in harmony with nature, by other than nature's common processes. The making of water into wine was not contrary to nature; for wine is a product of nature, chemically wrought from water by the laboratory of vegetation. The power in the one case is precisely the same as in the other; but in the miracle, the result is reached without the intervention of the common instrumentalities. As has been well said, "The miraculous consists in being, not *contra*natural but *supra*natural." It is the production of an effect in the sensible world, and upon or among the phenomena of nature, not against nature, but in a way not known to the ordinary course of nature's operations. It is the introduction of an activity into the course of nature, by which results in harmony with nature are reached, independently of nature's ordinary operations. To give an imperfect illustration. This book lies on the cushion before me. It is the law of nature for it to continue lying there, without the power of removing itself. I put my hand to it, and lift it up in the air. That result is not contrary to the laws of nature; neither does it involve the suspension of those laws which would have kept the book unmoved in its place, if I had not touched it. There has simply been the intervention of an independent power, in harmony with nature, but producing results which nature's common laws could not in that manner have

brought about. So in the matter of miracles, there is no negative or suspension of the laws of nature, but simply a modification or accomplishment of results by the intervention of a power not dependent on nature's ordinary activities.

And this is the exact character of the whole economy of grace. It is not something against nature, or which in any respect abrogates the natural constitution of things; but it is the intervention of a supernatural power upon and among the powers of nature, and in harmony with them, and looking to the same ends contemplated in them, but going forward to their accomplishment independent of them.

Man has fallen; and by that fall there has come a disturbance and paralysis into the workings of nature, rendering its processes inadequate to the requirements for our highest blessedness. Hence the necessity for a fresh putting forth of power, not to abolish nature, or to effect results contrary to what are contemplated in nature, but to help enfeebled nature to supply her deficiencies, and to hasten the very ends for which she toils, by independent agencies and supernatural aids. This is *Grace*, and the whole character and intent of the redemptive processes, signalled in the very first great act of the Saviour's public ministry.

II. *It was the transmutation of what was common into that which was precious.* This also was expressive, and opens up a line of light into the very heart of the whole mediatorial work. Christ

came not to destroy, but to fulfil. He is indeed the Author and Begetter of a new creation, but it is a new creation upon the basis of the old. He takes the common elements already existing, and from them, and upon them, evokes something better. He made wine of water; not wine without water. It is not the nature of his work to make a new order of creatures for saints, or a new order of faculties for religion, or a new planet for that future world wherein dwelleth righteousness; but it is his office to take the common man as he is, and the heavens and earth which now are, and by a new and supernatural putting forth of power upon them, to evolve from the one a pure, holy, and royal being, and for the other a fitting home and dominion for him forever. Precious as are those living jewels of his which the Saviour eventually gathers into the glorious cabinet of the world to come, they are in their origin mere men and women, of like passions with ourselves—ordinary humanity ennobled and transformed by supernatural grace into eternal kings and priests. Christianity, in its highest achievements and results, is simply the miraculous power of Jesus made effective in and upon the common elements of nature—the gladdening transfiguration of the common into the noble, the sinful into the holy, the earthy into the heavenly.

III. *It was done at a wedding festivity.* This, too, is significant. Had it no connection with some divine foresight of that spirit of false holiness

which afterwards arose in the Church, depreciating and despising marriage, and thus casting reproach upon the oldest institution of God upon earth? Was it not meant as a rebuke, in advance, of the miserable corruptions of the celibate, and the falsities of a sanctity which sought to divest itself of domestic ties and duties, and to earn its way to heaven by abnegations of nature contrary to the divine order? At any rate, the Saviour thus gave his sanction to married life, and "adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle" one of the few remaining things of Eden's loveliness. The social unit is the family. On it depends all social virtue, and all good order. Nor is there any secure bond of social purity and bliss but the sacredness of that institution which unites one man with one woman inviolably until death. Chist, therefore, began the establishment of his religion by the recognition of this institution, and gave his first miracle in the shape of a nuptial blessing. His first annunciation of himself as the Redeemer of the world was at a marriage. Christianity was inaugurated as the guardian and beautifier of the home. It was first planted by the side of matrimonial bonds, and shed its first blessings in honor of the ties of wedlock. And from that time to this, it has ever had its greatest strength, and given forth its greatest benedictions, in connection with those sacred relations. Whatsoever is at war with marriage, then, is at war with the religion of Christ; nay, "forbidding to marry" is one of the marks of the worst apos-

tasy. 1 Tim. 4: 1–3. People in their corruption and folly may think to improve on it; but they only dishonor God, and dishonor themselves. Where marriage is entered into, "reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God," the Saviour's sanction and blessing go with it. For this reason it has been thought fit, by all Christian people, to have it solemnized by religious ceremonies, conducted by a minister of the Church, and blessed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It is not an idle service, or the mere acknowledgment of a civil contract, but a proper and significant Christian solemnity, pledging the favor and benediction of Christ, and connecting most closely with everything sacred and pure. Nor should any one ever think of contracting matrimonial alliances on which the Saviour's blessing cannot be invoked, or at the celebration of which the Saviour could not be invited to be present.

Christ performed the first public acts of his Messiahship at a wedding, to express also that he came to sanctify and ennoble all human relations, and to bless all phases of life. He gave his first acknowledgments and contributions to augment domestic joys, and to sweeten the inmost springs of the social fabric, before he went forth to encounter the sorrows, and sins, and antagonisms of the world. Christianity is for seasons of festivity and gladness, as well as for periods of pain, depression, and grief. It is just here that people often grievously err. When they are happy and

prosperous, they feel no necessity for the presence of Christ, and care very little about having him in their company. They associate religion with sick-beds and burials, but find no occasion for it at bridals. As long as things go well with them, the Saviour hardly once enters into their thoughts; but when they are sick and in trouble, and weighed down with distress, then they begin to think about sending for him, and plead that he may come down in a great hurry to relieve them. But the true friends of Christ invite him to their weddings, as well as their funerals; and desire him to be present in their joys, as well as in their sorrows. And religion is just as necessary for prosperity as for adversity. There is no happiness so happy, but his presence can make it happier; and they who seek to have him at their bridals, can count more confidently on him in their sufferings and at their death-beds. It is a mistake, a sad and often fatal mistake, to suppose that Christianity is only for times of gloom and sadness, or that it does not accord with the delights, courtesies, and beauties of life, as well as with its sterner realities and afflictive experiences. Nay, it is just in those things which give the greatest zest, warmth, and glow to human existence, that its sanctifying presence is most needed, and where we should be most particular not to have it neglected or overlooked.

But Christ begun his gracious work at a wedding for the still further reason, that this gave the best intimation of the true nature and spirit of his

religion. It is not gloom, but gladness. It is not retirement into the wilderness and to the harsh austerities of the Essene or the anchorite, but living and warming contact with all the proper relations and duties of life, ennobled and sanctified by the fear and grace of God. It is a joy, a gladdener, a quickening festivity, meant to enliven, and beautify, and bless. It is a wretched falsehood to conceive of it as if it were a thing to interfere with our friendships, our comforts, our enjoyments. Christianity knows of nothing morose, sombre, or incompatible with the true pleasures of life. It is, indeed, a moderator to youthful lusts, intemperance, and vanity. It represses wild and unreasonable excesses. It draws the reins upon brutishness and extravagance. It will not sanction levity which runs to madness and idiocy. It will not allow pleasure which gathers its food from impurity. But it no more hinders gladness, or affectionate interest in others, or anything that belongs to the proper joys of earth, than the presence of Christ at the wedding of Cana dampened and destroyed the good cheer of its sanctified festivities. Nay, true piety is itself a marriage—a happy joining of the soul to its proper Head and protector, in whose blessed fellowship lies its sublimest comfort and glory. Irreligious people suppose, that when we ask them to become Christians, we ask them to lay aside everything pleasant, and to enter upon a life of sombreness and gloom. But such is not the fact. We are inviting them to a marriage

feast. We are asking them to cease from spend ing their money for that which is not bread, and from devoting their labor to that which satisfieth not, and to come, and buy wine and milk without money or price, and eat that which is good, and let their souls delight themselves in fatness. Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

IV. *This miracle was not wrought until the necessity for it became manifest*—not until the regular provision was exhausted. Important suggestions also connect with this circumstance. We need never expect Christ to interfere in our behalf where we already have the means of helping ourselves. We must not expect miracles to come to our relief, where ordinary industry and prudence on our own part would meet all necessities. Even the heathen knew thus much, that the gods help them that help themselves. We must ourselves do what we can. We must be diligent, provident, and forecasting, to the full extent of our means and opportunities. No slovenly negligence of ours can ever commend us to the favorable interposition of God. But where our resources fail, there Christ's sovereign bounty comes in to supply the deficiency. It is one of the great principles in the economy of grace, that man's necessity is God's opportunity. It is only when people come to see and feel their deficiencies, and their own utter incompetency, that Christ comes to their help. When the mountains close Israel in

on either side, and behind them are Egypt's pursuing hosts, and before them the sea, then the command goes forth from the throne to "stand still, and see the salvation of God." And always, in the history of God's people, the paradoxical saying of Paul has proved true: "My strength is made perfect in weakness: . . for when I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Cor. 12 : 9, 10.

V. *Christ was very particular that this miracle should appear as the product of his own suggestion and will.* His mother was there. In the true excellence of womanhood, and in its true sphere, we trace in her a charitable solicitude, a delicacy of interest, and an anxious considerateness for the wants of the occasion and the honor of her friends, which clothe the ministry of common household things with an air of sacred beauty. We recognize at once a true woman, in her true place, as she quietly communicates with her Son about the exhaustion of what was considered important to the character of the occasion, and hints to him the propriety of doing something to relieve the embarrassing deficiency. What she expected of him we do not exactly know. But the reply of the Saviour, though it hinted that it was in his purpose in some way to interfere, seems to have been specially framed to separate what he was about to do from any share on her part in it. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

These words, in the original, express no dis-

respect; but there is an undertone of gentle rebuke in them, which it is difficult to believe had no adverse reference to the Maryolatry of after times. They at any rate draw a line, distinct and broad, between the spheres of Mary's motherhood and his own Christhood. Though she was his mother, he would not agree to know her, to any extent whatever, as a partner in the work of wonder which he was about to perform. She was indeed his mother, but he alone was the Christ; and he would have it understood, that no powers or offices of his Christhood were at her command. No solicitations of hers were to be the directories of his Divine prerogatives. At his own time, and in his own way, he meant to interfere, and not to her was any of the honor to be due. He required no partnership in his sufferings, and he would have no partnership in the expressions of his almighty beneficence. Popery places the virgin mother between Christ and the Church, and teaches its misguided adherents that "in her God has placed the plenitude of all good, in such sort, that if there be in us any hope, any spiritual health, it is from her we receive it." But how do all such idolatrous utterances stand rebuked and condemned before these words, which lie at the very threshold of the Messianic work! How did the Saviour here put aside even his own mother from all participation in the administration of his mercies! How did he here settle, once for all, that his being born of a virgin gave her neither claim nor place to share with him in the

dispensation of his gracious bounties! The servants she might command, but not the movements of her son's Almightiness. In these high things she had nothing to do with him, nor he with her. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2 : 5. And with no virgin mother does he share his miracles on earth, or his Mediatorship in heaven. His mediatorial works are all the movements of his own sovereign will, and the products of his own Divine power, undivided and unparcelled with any other being that now lives, or that ever has lived.

VI. *This miracle was wrought in reverse of the usual order on such occasions.* The world sets forth the good wine at the beginning; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but Christ produced the best at the last. And here again there was a setting forth of the nature of God's method over against that which ordinarily prevails. It is the uniform rule of the world and sin to give their best first. It has been justly said: "The world does indeed give its best and its fairest at the beginning, its 'good wine' first, but has only baser substitutes at the last. 'When men have well drunk,' when their spiritual palate is blunted, when they have lost the discernment between moral good and evil, then it puts upon them what it would not have dared to offer at the first—coarser pleasures, viler enjoyments, the swines' husks. The world is for them that wor-

ship it, even as that great image which the Baby lonian king beheld (Dan. 2 : 31); its head, indeed, may show us fine gold, but its material grows ever baser, till it finishes in the iron and clay at the last. And so it comes to pass that

> To be a prodigal's favorite, then, worse lot,
> A miser's pensioner,

is the portion of them that have entered upon the service of sin and of the world. But it is very otherwise with the guests of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom. He ever reserves for them whom *he* has bidden 'the good wine' unto the last." (Trench's Miracles, pp. 93, 94.)

The Christian order is, the cross first, then the crown—repentance before spiritual peace—trials before victories — toils of earth before rest in heaven—the losses and sufferings of time before the rewards of eternity. As Jeremy Taylor expresses it: "The world presents us with fair language, promising hopes, convenient fortunes, pompous honors, and these are the outside of the bowl; but when it is swallowed, these dissolve in an instant, and there remains bitterness and the malignity of coloquintida. Every sin smiles in the first address, and carries light in the face, and honey in the lip; but when we 'have well drunk,' then comes 'that which is worse,' a whip with six strings, fears and terrors of conscience, and shame and displeasure, and a caitiff disposition, and diffidence in the day of death. But when, after the

manner of the purifying of the Christians, we fill our waterpots with water, watering our couch with our tears, and moistening our cheeks with the perpetual distillations of repentance, then Christ turns our water into wine, first penitents, then communicants—first waters of sorrow, and then the wine of the chalice; . . for Jesus keeps the best wine to the last, not only because of the direct reservation of the highest joys till the nearer approaches of glory, but also because our riches are higher after a long fruition than at the first essays, such being the nature of grace, that it increases in relish as it does in fruition, every part of it being new duty and new reward."

VII. *I notice yet one other point. This miracle wrought great spiritual effects.* It caused his disciples to believe on him; that is, to accredit and cleave to him as the promised Messiah. And there is every reason that it should so affect them. An undoubted divine wonder had been wrought. "The modest water saw its God and blushed." The same power which works in nature, and ordained her laws, here had shown itself distinct from nature, and above nature, embodied in the humble Son of Mary. Well, then, might they rest assured that their Master was a teacher come from God; for no man could do such a miracle if God were not with him.

And such, indeed, is the object and intent of all Christ's works of wonder. He means that we shall see in him our proper Lord and Saviour.

He means that we shall have confidence in him as the Son of God, receive his word, and trust in his gracious guidance. He means that we shall lay aside all doubts and questionings of his power and goodness, and rest ourselves on him as the sanctifier of life, the purifier of our pleasures, the helper of our necessities, the joy of our homes, and the everlasting portion of our souls. Nor is there any reason why the lesson for this morning should not work in every one of us to-day what the original enactment of its facts wrought in the hearts of his disciples. If this miracle confirmed and established them, it ought to confirm and establish us. If it begot and deepened faith in them, it ought to beget and deepen faith in us. O let us open our hearts to the glory and grace of Jesus as it streams upon us from this beautiful picture! Let us not hesitate to give our hearts and everlasting confidence to him who comes to replenish them with the good wine of his unfailing goodness! Whatsoever he may bid us, that let us do! And the water of our common life shall become to us a joyous beverage; and whatever is lacking by reason of our poverty, shall be abundantly supplied by his exhaustless bounty.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATT. 8 : 1–13. When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him, a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

THESE successive Epiphany Sundays, as the Church has thought it well to arrange them, present the outlines of the various ways in which Christ was manifested to the faith of men. We have seen him as an infant,

revealed to the faithful sages as the promised King of Israel. We have seen him as a child, lingering in the temple, giving his youthful soul to his Father's business, yet meekly biding his time in a life of lowly obedience and love in his earthly home. We have seen him at length coming forth to the work of his grand ministry, and inaugurating his dispensation with a wedding miracle, signalling at once his Divine almightiness, and the character of his religion. And in the Gospel for this morning he appears before us in new illustrations of himself, and of his relation to the wants of those whom he came to redeem. Two notable miracles are before us. That at Cana was a miracle of nature; these are miracles of man—miracles of mercy. That showed him as the beneficent Master of the forces that work in the world of inanimate things; these reveal him as the gracious Lord of a higher realm, swaying moral as well as physical administrations. He here cleanses a leper, and heals a paralytic. He had just finished his great sermon on the mount. He had just given utterance to those precious beatitudes which so mark that discourse. And what he had just expressed in words, he here translates into works.

The two cases have much in common, but also much in which they differ. They were both cases of distressing physical ailment. His help in both was earnestly solicited. In both there was a high and appreciative confidence in his capacity and power. And in both there was a very marvellous cure wrought. But the suffering in one was lep-

rosy; in the other, palsy. The leper applied in his own behalf; the paralytic's case was presented by his master. The leper was cured by a touch; the paralytic was healed by a word, spoken at a distance. In the one case the cure was wrought on the faith of the subject; in the other, on the faith of an interceding friend. But both together unite in a revelation of the glory and mercy of the Saviour, which we may well consider with devout attention and reverent awe.

We might profitably employ ourselves upon this subject, by looking at it as an illustration of the condition of man and the means of his relief. But I propose to consider it simply as a picture of true Faith.

I. *What it sees in Christ;*

II. *With what affections it moves towards Christ;*

III. *How it is honored and answered by Christ.*

There appears to have been something exceedingly impressive and commanding about the style of the Saviour's utterances. His words seem to have gone directly to the hearts of his hearers, awakening emotions and ideas not known to human discourse. On one occasion, certain officers, who were sent out to arrest him, after hearing his words, came back with their commission unfulfilled, giving as their excuse, that "never man spake like this man." And so in the delivery of his sermon on the mount, "the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." It was per-

haps through the impressions which he had thus made by his utterances, and the fame of his miracles which accompanied him, and was noised abroad concerning him, that the leper and the centurion of the text, had learned to know of him, and had formed their opinions concerning him. At any rate, they had become possessed of an acquaintance with his character, which directed their attention to him with a degree of interest and hopeful expectation rendering them fit subjects for his miraculous mercy.

1. Both of these applicants for the Saviour's aid assigned to him the character of a great HEALER. It was for the relief of physical ailment that they approached him. They believed that it was in his power to cure bodily diseases. Whether they conceived of corporeal sufferings as the effects and emblems of moral defection, as they are, and consciously embraced the healing of souls in their idea of Christ's curative power, we are not informed. But that this is implied, is evident from what Christ elsewhere says concerning the relation between the forgiveness of sins and the healing of diseases. It is not to be inferred that the particular evils of any given individual are necessarily the result of that individual's own sins; but all physical sufferings have moral evils somewhere for their roots. Human sufferings are from human sins; and only He who can forgive and purge away sins, can effectually arrest and remove physical disorders.

It is also an important element of the nature of saving faith, to see in Christ the attributes and qualities of a great Physician. He himself appropriated this as one of his proper titles. He is the true Healer of human maladies—the real master and extinguisher of all earthly distempers and sufferings. Other physicians may somewhat mollify the pains of some diseases, or keep them in partial abeyance for a little while; but they cannot reach the causes of them, so as to guarantee man against them. They cannot cancel sin, nor purge away the depravity that lurks in humanity; and while that remains, diseases and sufferings will come, in spite of all remedial and sanitary precautions and efforts. But Christ takes away *the sins* of the world. He is a healer of souls. And by the expurgation of moral disorder, it is his office to make an utter end of all pain, disease, and death. Purifying the heart and mind through sanctification of the Spirit and sprinkling of his atoning blood, it is his function to lift off forever the whole train of evils which have come upon our nature, to change our vile bodies and fashion them like unto his own glorious body, and to introduce into the blessedness of a life in which "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain"

2. Both these applicants also saw in Christ *a superhuman power*. Leprosy is specially singled out in the Scriptures as the most terrible and incurable of all diseases. A fully developed case

of it, is more than a man can well endure to look on. I have met dozens of sufferers from it, and never without an involuntary shudder, causing me to hold my breath, and put spurs to my horse to gallop away with all possible speed from the neighborhood of its presence. One glance at some of these objects, is enough to satisfy a man forever, that it is an ailment over which human skill can have no power. Where it exists, it has always been regarded as a special affliction of God, which God alone can cure. And when this poor leper ventured to break through the restrictions which the laws of his country imposed upon him, and cast himself at the feet of Jesus, sure of relief if only he was willing, I see in his case the recognition of a power in Christ which belongs alone to the Almighty. Such also was the view which impressed itself upon the king of Israel, when Naaman came to him with letters from the king of Syria. "Am I God," said he, "to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man of his leprosy?" 2 Kings 5 : 7. Nothing less than an act of Deity could do so great a thing. And when this leper said to Jesus, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" he saw in him a power which pertained only to the Creator himself.

The case of the centurion expressed, if possible, a still higher conception of the Saviour's potency. It is not so much the nature of the disease which he wished to have cured, that brings out his idea, although a bad case of palsy is about as much

above human skill as leprosy itself. We get the exalted character which he entertained of Christ more from the manner of his application, than from the particular favor for which he asked. The leper thought it necessary that he should bring his case into Christ's immediate presence; but the centurion did not conceive that to be necessary. Jesus proposed to go with him to his house; but he would not have the Master so trouble himself. He desired him to "speak the word only," assured that that alone would be amply sufficient and effective. He had reasoned out the matter from his own case. He was a subordinate military commander. Above him were many other and superior ranks. Yet, in his subordinate place, he said to one go, and he went, and to another come, and he came, and to his servant do this, and he did it. And if *he*, who was but "a man under authority," was thus potent in his commands, much more would the Saviour's words be effective, though spoken at a distance, and with reference to a subject whom he had never seen. He thus conceived of Jesus as standing at the head of a great kingdom of invisible potencies, and the very Lord of spiritual powers, to whom he needed only to give the word to work whatsoever he would. The idea is both original and grand. It views Christ, as another and higher Cæsar, at the centre of another and higher empire, to which all forces of heaven and earth are subject.

And most profoundly does it inhere in the nature of true faith, never to think meanly of

Christ. Either our views of the necessities of the case are superficial and erroneous, or the degree of our confidence must be very imperfect and unsatisfying, until we find a Christ "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him." True faith, therefore, sees in Jesus a Being, not only endowed with power surpassing that of all other men, but so mysteriously related to God himself, as to be able to wield in his own right and name, the very functions of Omnipotence. It necessarily must view him as possessed of "a name which is above every name," and as "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Eph. 1 : 21. He is a mighty Lord, "able to save unto the uttermost." Heb. 7 : 25.

3. Both of these persons further saw in Christ *a most encouraging beneficence.* Otherwise they never could have applied to him as they did. The leper even broke through the common restraints of the law, and forced himself, with all his uncleanness, into the Saviour's presence, and undertook to speak to him; which he could not have thought of doing toward so worshipful a Being, if it had not been that he was somehow impressed and persuaded that Jesus was too gracious to be offended, and too full of mercy and sympathy with the suffering to spurn his entreaties. The centurion was similarly persuaded, or he never could have thought of laying such a request

before such a high spiritual Cæsar as he seems to have considered Christ to be.

And just so it is with all true faith. It sees the majesty and almightiness of Christ pervaded and directed by a merciful goodness, quite equal to his power, and which presents him to the soul as one whom it would be safe to approach, and from whom, if from any one, the needed help could be obtained. It is not enough simply to see Christ in his proper offices, and to be awed before his majesty and power. This is necessary; but, without another element to draw and persuade into the belief that those offices and that power are really available for us, and that there is a comfortable prospect of having our applications entertained if we make them, the very point on which everything hangs is wanting. True faith believes, not only that *He is*, but that "He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him." It believes that he is willing as he is able, and as condescending and gracious as he is great. Hence the fulness of the Scriptures to show the goodness of the Saviour's tenderness, his readiness to give attention to the poorest and unworthiest of the race, and his cheerful and willing entertainment of every case introduced to his attention. His words are: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Nay, the great grief of his heart is, that people will not come unto him that they might have life. Matt. 10:28; John 7:37; John 5:40. And true

faith sees this mercifulness in Christ, and is persuaded that nothing is to be risked in drawing near to him, and confidently anticipates, that whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out. This, then, is what true faith sees in Christ.

II. What, now, are the affections with which it moves toward him?

1. *It despairs of help in any one but Christ.* This is traceable in both of the cases before us. The leper certainly could not dream of any other cure. It was the nature of his disease to be beyond all human help or mastery. And the message of the centurion, as given by another Evangelist, bore in its very terms the acknowledgment, that, unless Christ would instantly interfere, all hope would be gone forever. They both felt that this was their last and only resort. They had tried other remedies, but all to no avail. If Jesus would not show favor to them, they had nothing left but despair. And it is so in every case. As long as a man thinks there is help or hope for him anywhere but in direct devout application to Christ, just so long there is no true saving faith in him. Whilst it is in a man's heart to apologize for himself, as being no worse than other people, or as being too moral and conscientious to be cast off simply for want of the mere item of trusting in Christ only, or as being able to recommend himself to Divine clemency by his good citizenship or his benevolent works, or declines to look to Jesus

in utter despair of ever being saved in any other way, he has not yet begun to believe with that faith which alone God will honor.

"None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."

"Lord, save, or I perish!" is the cry of every soul as it stretches out its hands to take saving hold of Christ and his grace. Its language, as it moves toward the refuge set before it, is:

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must forever die.

The Scriptures are in nothing more specific in their statements than in this, that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. And until men come to feel and realize this, they have not yet come to the exercise of that faith which insures the Saviour's gracious aid.

2. True faith is also attended with *a feeling of great unworthiness.* The leper cast himself at the Saviour's feet, and worshipped him. Whether he meant it as an act of adoration of Christ's Divinity, is not affirmed. It was at any rate an act of profound reverence—an humble acknowledgment that the Saviour was so infinitely above him, that he was utterly unfit to appear in his presence. His uncleanness—his uncleanness! this

pressed him to the earth, and made him ashamed with an inexpressible humility, as he ventured to address himself to a Being so pure and glorious. And so the centurion also. He was a Gentile, and, as we learn from Luke, did not feel fit to venture to approach Jesus in his own person. He was indeed a man in authority, with a hundred brave Romans under his command, but unlike the swaggering high-mindedness which usually attends people "dressed in a little brief authority," he felt a personal insignificance in Christ's presence which he scarcely knew how to express. And even after the Saviour proposed to answer his request, his exclamation was: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof."

And so it is in all true approaches to the blessed Saviour. Faith is the consciousness of the finite creature in the presence of infinite power and greatness; of the corrupt and guilty sinner in the presence of absolute holiness; of debased and needy beggary in the presence of Almighty Lordship and glory. And it is impossible, in such a position, not to experience the profoundest sense of unworthiness. It made Jacob feel that he was not worthy "of the least" of God's mercies. It made Job "abhor" himself "in dust and ashes." It made Isaiah cry, "Woe is me! I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips!" It made Paul declare himself "the least of all saints," and John fall at Christ's feet "as dead." Nor can a man have true faith in Christ, without feeling that he is nothing but an unclean leper, and an unworthy

heathen, as respects all claim to his gracious compassion or merciful regard.

> The more his glories strike our eyes,
> The humbler we shall lie.

3. True faith is likewise attended with *earnest and practical interest in others.* The leper could not keep the blessed cure a secret. The gladness of his soul broke out through all restraints. Mark tells us that "he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter." He wished to have it known what a glorious Saviour he had found, that other sufferers might also share in his gracious benefactions. And the centurion's interest, was as much a matter of affection for a suffering domestic as advantage to himself. There may indeed be sympathy, mercy, and benevolent interest for our suffering fellow-men, where there is no faith, and no true Christianity; but there can be no true faith where there is no tenderness and affectionate interest for others. Experimental religion necessarily and invariably deepens, widens, and strengthens the social sympathies. When a leper is cured, he will publish the blessed fact. When Andrew finds the Messiah, he will tell it to his brother, Simon Peter. When Philip discovers Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, he will make it known to Nathaniel, and invite him also to come and see him. When the Samaritan woman finds Him who giveth the water of life, she will forget her worldly errand, and run to inform her fellow citi-

zens, and call them also to come and look upon the Christ, who told her all that ever she did. Nor is there a sick servant, or any sufferer of the race, or needy sinner in the world, in whose behalf true faith in Christ will not interest every one who really possesses it. It is a thing that works by love, and carries charity and good will with it as its proper, necessary and inseparable fruit.

III. Notice, then, the manner in which the Saviour met the faith of these men.

1. *He graciously entertained their applications.* Though the leper was an unclean outcast, Christ allowed him to come to him. He listened to his humble entreaty. He pitied him in his dreadful affliction and isolation. He even laid his hand encouragingly on him. Though all other men shrunk from him in horror, he welcomed him in the tenderest compassion. And it was the same with the centurion. Though a Gentile, and belonging to a profession the most remote from piety and purity, and interceding for a mere servant, Christ did not turn away, but showed at once the utmost readiness to serve him. Oh, the compassionateness of Christ to them that seek him! How true the saying of old, "He despiseth not any!" Job 36 : 5. Who could have been less likely to enlist his kind regards than this loathsome leper, and this heathen stranger? They were the very last that any one would have

hit upon as subjects for his gracious benefactions. But they had faith in him, and he honored that faith. And he is the same Jesus now that he was then. It matters not who it is that seeks his favors;—let it be the unworthiest, guiltiest and uncleanest of mankind; whether they be persons serving in official places, or wandering and wretched outcasts from society;—if they will but humbly and earnestly apply for his help, he will listen to their prayers, and entertain their supplications, and sympathize with their sufferings, and encourage their approaches. His words to every weary and heavy laden one is, "Come unto me—come unto me." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6 : 37.

2. *He mercifully granted their requests.* The imploring leper had said to him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." The centurion came with the petition, "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. . . Speak the word only, and my servant shall live. . . . And Jesus saith, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." Blessed answers to believing prayers! There was no imposing of hard conditions—no keeping of the applicants in suspense—no hesitation as if in doubt what to do. At once, on the spot, the commands were given, and the

cures were wrought. Though no human power could cleanse the tainted blood of the leper, Christ cleansed him, and he was healed forever. Though the tormented paralytic was in the very article of death, as Luke tells us, Jesus sent forth his word, and he was healed in that selfsame hour. O the resources of grace and power that God has put at the command of humble faith!

3. But the Saviour did for these suppliants still greater things. *He introduced them into another empire.* The outward was only the expression of something far more blessed wrought within. With the leper's physical uncleanness went the moral defilement of his soul; for in the Saviour's miracles, the healing of diseases and the forgiveness of sins were linked together, and were but two aspects of one and the same transaction. And concerning the centurion he said, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." What Christ could thus commend, must needs have carried with it all those high spiritual blessings pronounced upon believers. Nay, to this effect are his own words given in connection with the case: "I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Nor was it anything less than citizenship in that blessed kingdom which inured to these meek suppliants. It is said of Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, that "they desire a

better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has prepared for them a city." Heb. 11:16. And it was fellow-heirship to the same, of which this leper and this centurion were made partakers. They had come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. Heb. 12:22–24. And O, the blessedness and glory of that kingdom—that fellowship—that country!

I know not, oh, I know not
What joys await us there;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.

And to that "dear, dear country"—to that golden Jerusalem, "with milk and honey blest"—to that

—— Paradise of joy,
Where tears are ever banished,
And smiles have no alloy;
Whose ageless walls are bonded
With amethyst unpriced;
Where saints make up the fabric
And the corner-stone is CHRIST;

to that blessed "building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,"—it is the office,

will, and power of Jesus, to introduce every one that believes.

What shall we say, then, to these things? Is not that a dear and precious Saviour whom these Scriptures disclose to us? Is not that a glorious consolation to poor lepers and paralytics like us, that is thus opened up in this Jesus of Nazareth? And is it not a wondrous privilege, that the way is clear for every one of us to go to him this day, and be healed forever of whatever disease we have? O, my friends, let us see to it that we do not miss our chance. Christ is near us now. Here and there we hear of the healing miracles he has wrought. And shall we sit still in our miseries and guilt, and make no effort to be partakers of his heavenly benefactions? Again, I say to you, as a minister of his Gospel—

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore!
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity joined with power:
He is able,
He is willing: doubt no more.

Come, ye thirsty! come and welcome;
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,—
Every grace that brings us nigh,—
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Matt. 8 : 23–27. And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

WE teach, that God the Son became man, and was born of the blessed Virgin Mary; and that the two natures, human and Divine, inseparably united in one person, are one Christ, who is true God and man." (Augsburg Conf., Art. iii.)

We accordingly find a very remarkable and sublime contrast, running through his entire earthly history, corresponding with this mystery of his twofold nature.

He was born in a stable, a poor and helpless babe; yet, angels sang his birth-hymn, and sages and kings came from afar, and knelt in humble worship at his infant feet. He went up to the temple, an unlettered youth; yet amazed the profoundest doctors with his wonderful intelligence. He was an hungered in the wilderness, suffering

for want of food, as a helpless mortal; yet, in the midst of his weakness, he encountered Satan with more than an angel's strength, and vanquished him alone, as no other man ever did. He was so indigent, that he had not where to lay his head, and could not pay his taxes without a miracle; yet, whithersoever he went, he strewed his path with gifts, more costly and magnificent than royalty ever dispensed. With Mary at her brother's grave, he stood weeping as a disconsolate mourner; yet, by a mere call, recovered the buried Lazarus to life. He sought fruit on the fig-tree, as one dependent upon nature's tardy processes for subsistence; yet, he fed and satisfied a company of five thousand hungry men with five loaves and two small fishes, and had enough left to feed a thousand more. And so, in the Gospel for this morning; though wearied and sleeping, as a man whose strength toil had wasted; yet, he commands the wind and the sea, and arrests and chains the tempests and the waves.

An old expositor has said, that the miracle here described was what the Psalmist had in view when he said: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep: for he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof; they mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble; they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry

unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Ps. 107 : 23–31. However that may be, we here behold the Saviour as the God of raging elements, who is able, at pleasure, to calm their fiercest convulsions, and pacify their most terrible throes, with the mere words of his lips.

The scene of this miracle was the sea of Galilee—a bright fresh-water lake, less than twenty by ten miles in extent—not "blue," as Byron dreamed, but clear as a raindrop, nestled down some three hundred feet below the surface of the ocean, in a deep volcanic bed, inclosed by bald brown mountainous hills, in the northeastern section of Palestine. Having looked upon it from end to end, bathed in its waters, gathered shells and pebbles on its beach, and spent a Sunday on its quiet shores, I know whereof I affirm. There are more beautiful lakes; but I have seen it with other eyes than those which behold in it nothing but a tame and uninviting picture.

> Graceful around thee the mountains meet,
> Thou calm reposing sea!

"Its hills are bare, its margins desolate, its cities ruins, but its own beauty is unchanged. Its palms are gone; its palaces, and temples, and syn-

agogues are as dust; its fortresses, that like sentinels challenged each other from its opposite sides, are swept away; its gardens and orchards have withered; its rock sepulchres have been filled and emptied, emptied and filled, and emptied again. Jew, Roman, Christian, Moslem, have come and gone; its many vessels, the pleasure-barge, the fisherman's boat, and the war-galley, have vanished from its waters; but there it lies—itself untouched and unsoiled by earthquake, battle, havoc, blood, death, change, or ruin. Hermon, on the north, with its snows; and Tabor, on the south, with its oaks, still keep watch over its waters." On its widest western side, the level flood washes a low and graceful shore, opening out towards the hills—one of the garden spots of the land of Promise. On its eastern side, its waves dash against higher and more rugged steeps, surrounded by loftier mountains, lending to it their solemn shade, as the more distant Lebanon the outlines of majesty and grandeur.

It was here that Jesus spent most of his last years, and most of the days after his resurrection. These levelled ruins mark the sites where he lived, and preached, and wrought most of his wonderful works. These rugged steeps are the places whither he withdrew himself for rest, for communion with his disciples, and for prayer to his Father in heaven. On these islandless waters he often rowed, and walked, and slept, and retreated, as he spake to the multitudes on the shore. And on this lake, in sight of these over-

looking hills, occurred what this day's Gospel recounts. It would almost seem as if those words of power still pressed upon the place. There is to this hour a silent calm upon that sea and its encompassing shores, and a breathless stillness on all the life there encountered, as if yet wondering in solemn awe at the Divine majesty which there displayed itself in Jesus of Nazareth.

Besieged and oppressed with the inconsiderate multitude, the Saviour gave commandment to his disciples to embark for a passage to the opposite side of this lake. When they entered the ship, everything was calm and peaceful. But they had not proceeded far, until there arose one of those sudden squalls for which that lake is famous. The result was a wild scene of tumult and violence. Nature seemed for the moment all thrown into disorder. The storm poured down in fury from the mountain gorges upon the yielding waters. Galilee was in profound commotion, rolling up its angry waves, and dashing them fearfully over the tossing ship. Though waters never bore a more precious burden, nor ship a more exalted passenger, everything was tumultuous and threatening, as if all the powers of Bedlam were broken loose, and bent upon his destruction. Even those accustomed to those waters began to be overwhelmed with despair. Human strength was weakness, and human skill but folly, in the unequal contest with the angry elements.

It was not mere accident. It was the background of a picture meant to set forth the Sav-

iour's almightiness, and to illustrate great and glorious truths touching the estate of his people in this world, and his own sublime relation to them amid the adversities of life. Luther has well observed, that, in that ship we are to see the Church; in that sea, the world; in that storm, the commotions which Satan excites against the Gospel and its adherents; in those disciples, the true preachers and followers of Christ in every age of this world; and in that sleeping, awaking, and omnipotent Jesus, the gracious power which the troubled saints ever have at their command. In this view, then, let us dwell a little upon it; praying that God may make it a lesson of comfort to our souls.

I. *The way of obedience leads through many a scene of boisterous trouble.* It is a voyage across a sea liable to terrible storms. In this present world, goodness does not exempt from affliction. Though there be many sorrows from which piety saves, there are many others which it alone imposes. It is a building which has its costs—a profession which has its own peculiar burdens. The Saviour himself was a sufferer; and "the servant is not greater than his Lord." John 15 : 20. Whatever attainments in sanctification we may make in this life, the Master's words are ever true: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." John 16 : 33. This world is a Tiberian lake, sometimes calm and beautiful, but easily angered, and often furiously boisterous, and unmanageably dangerous.

Christian life lies through that lake, with no islands to which to anchor, or on which to rest, from one shore to the other. At times much good may be fished up from its depths; but the Christian's passage over it is beset with storms.

Some of these storms come from without, and some from within, and the one class helps to beget and heighten the other.

Every true Christian is the subject of dislike and scorn from this world. It may not always be expressed, but it exists; and when the test is applied, it will be discovered, and make itself felt. Jesus knew what was in man; and Jesus says, "The world hateth you." John 15 : 19. And that hatred will manifest itself. The people of God have, accordingly, always been an afflicted and persecuted people. For every Abel there has been a Cain—for every Israel, a Pharaoh and an Amalek—for every Jerusalem, a Babylon—and for every outgoing of apostolic faith and zeal, a Nero and a Caligula. The history of the Church is a history of suffering, tears, and blood. When persecution of one form ceased, it soon broke out afresh in some other. And to this day, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3 : 12.

Every Christian also has on hand a fearful conflict with his own evil heart and depraved flesh. He who knows nothing of this, may feel assured that he is either spiritually asleep, or quite dead. Worldly cares, business vexations, domestic anxieties, and bodily pains, also come in to make the

inward struggle more severe, by weakening moral resolution, and embarrassing the freedom of communication with the source of spiritual supplies. Satan, also, is ever on the alert for unguarded moments in which to assail us, and is ever busy stirring up doubts, unbelief, evil lusts, rebellious tempers, uncharitable feelings, and hurling his fiery darts to destroy our peace. And from these several sources come often such terrible storms, that the Christian is made to cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. 7 : 24.

II. Through whatever storms and commotions the way of Christian obedience may lie, *they are for some good purpose.* They do not come by accident, or because there is no power in Christ to prevent them. They are all embraced in the account which underlies the appointments and commands of Christianity. They are part of a grand and sovereign system, which makes even the wrath of man to praise God, and the weaknesses and the wickednesses of men tributary to his great and beneficent ends. That storm on Genesareth had blessed lessons in it, which those tossed and despairing disciples needed to learn, and which could in no other way be more effectually taught them. They needed to be more deeply impressed concerning their own helplessness. They needed to have wider views of Christ's power and grace. They needed to realize more thoroughly where alone their true help and conso-

lation lay. They needed to be stirred up to a more earnest seeking unto the Lord their strength. And all this was wrought by the tempest that came upon them.

It is the same with all the trials and adversities of the saints. They are not meant just to make the way to heaven hard; nor as though God took pleasure in the sufferings of his people; nor yet, that it is impossible for him to order otherwise; but they are the product of a common law in the economy of grace, stated by the Saviour when he said, "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bear more fruit." John 15:2. They are intended to develop the good which has taken root—to bring faith and obedience to their highest tests, and their greatest possible strength and glory. God sifts us as wheat, not to injure the wheat, but to free it of its noxious admixtures. He takes us through trials and temptations, not to destroy us, or needlessly to disturb us; but with the same view and intent that the blacksmith puts the piece of steel in the hot fires, and under the heavy hammer, and in the jaws of the vice, and under the teeth of the rasp, and on the grinding-stone. He does not mean ill to the bruised metal; but these are the requisite processes by which he seeks to develop and fashion it into a shining blade, to be worn in triumph on the hero's side, or borne aloft before him in the celebrations of his victory.

When the storm was upon these voyagers, they were overwhelmed with anxiety, and cried out

with alarm and despair. But the issue, after all, was good and blessed. How did they ever afterwards look back upon it as the medium of experiences and light for which they might well afford to encounter a hundred such dangers! How did it exalt the Saviour in their eyes! How did it shame their lack of faith, and their trust in their own powers! How did it set out and recommend to them the almighty goodness of their Lord! Well might they exclaim, O blessed storm! that showed us such a Saviour, and introduced us to such a Deliverer! And like blessedness is contemplated in all the trials of the saints. You think it hard to have to bear the sneers, and dislikes, and persecutions of the world around you. You think it hard to have to deny yourself of many of the gay pleasures and glittering gains and honors of people who make no conscience of how they live and act. You think it hard, that for all your well-meant efforts, you are ill-spoken of, and slighted, and abused, and made to suffer wrongs, as if you were one of the most unprincipled of people. You think it hard to keep up this continual strife against temptation, to be ever struggling, with so little increase of strength, and comfort, and gain, upon the bad passions which you desire to conquer. You think it hard that you are so kept down, and neglected, and afflicted, whilst others are prospered, and courted, and favored with everything that heart could wish. You are often tired and sick of your lot, and so oppressed with your burdens,

that you cry with the Psalmist: "O that I had wings like a dove; for then I would flee away, and be at rest." You have had one trouble after another come upon you,—bereavements, losses, alienations, sicknesses, and hard necessities, and disheartening misfortunes, — turning your very existence into bitterness; and you said in your heart, with all the grief of Jacob: "All these things are against me!" Gen. 42:36. But they were not against you, any more than his troubles were against him. They were God's mysterious ways to do you good, to save your soul from death, to water your spiritual graces, to enlarge and deepen your faith, and for all to make you the more blessed in the end. It was the storm on Galilee, to show you more of yourself, and more of your Saviour, and more of the proper rewards of the faithful. And the time will come, when you will look back upon the deepest and worst of your sorrows, and count them among your Lord's greatest mercies, and sing songs of thanksgiving for those hours of dread and darkness as the very birth-hours of your highest blessedness. It is the cross that brings the crown; the storm of time that heralds the peace of eternity.

III. Whatever storms may overtake Christian voyagers, there is also in the text this consoling fact: *Christ is with them in the ship.* He is ever in his Church and ordinances, and he never leaves nor forsakes his obedient disciples. On land and on sea, in sunshine and in shade, he is with them.

There is no temptation so mighty, no trial so heavy, no affliction or sorrow so severe, but he shares it with them. He is in the same ship which carries them, and feels with them the force of the same commotions. Poor, unthinking mortals are slow to believe it. When they are prosperous, and the sea is smooth before them, they forget that they owe it all to Christ; and when troubles and dangers assail them, they despond and fear, as if they had no Saviour. They forget that Jesus is in the ship.

When this storm came upon the disciples, the Saviour "was asleep." It was not such a sleep as that he was wholly ignorant of what was transpiring. He foresaw that storm before he gave the command which led into it. He knew what the facts would be, and they were not absent from his mind while he slumbered in the rocking hold. Nay, he slept more especially in view of what was about to transpire. He is not careful to deliver us from troubles, or to give us forewarnings of trials, which are to be for our improvement. Sometimes he seems to give over his people to the most unequal contests, and to extremities which might seem to argue that he cared not for them. Job is left to see his possessions wrested from him and his children in their graves, to feel in his flesh the malignity of Satan, and to hear his own wife urging him to curse God and die. The very existence of the chosen people is made bitter to them under the severities of Egyptian taskmasters. David is left to wander as a persecuted

fugitive in the mountains. John the Baptist is left to pine and die in Herod's prison. And the Church is left to suffer, and the most exalted saints to endure the extremest wrongs and to battle with the sternest adversities. It is but a repetition of what is narrated in the text. The storm is upon the disciples, and Jesus sleeps. Overmatched by the raging elements, and ready to despair, their Helper sleeps. But still, he is with them in the ship. This ought to have been enough for them, as it ought to be enough for us. Though he was asleep, still he was there; and it argued a great faultiness of faith to think themselves in danger while he was in the ship. To sink them, he also would have to be sunk. To destroy them, his Almightiness would have to be destroyed. And his presence there, though asleep, is pledge enough that they are safe, and that, unequal as the contest is, they shall not be the losers by it.

Are you a sufferer, then, "in mind, body, or estate?" Have storms overtaken you in your voyage? Are you in fear of the waves and of death? Does it seem to you as if you had been abandoned to your fate, uncomforted and unhelped? "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Bethink you of the facts. If your troubles have been incurred by duty's calls, and if you have really linked your destiny with the man of Nazareth, survey your company before you give up to despair. Is not Jesus with you in the ship? And if he be there, what matters it that he sleeps?

His very calmness ought to give you confidence. If *he* sees no danger, why should you? If these threatening waves and angry waters have nothing in them to disturb his peaceful slumber, why should you give up everything for lost? Can the almighty Saviour perish? Is it in the power of this world's elements to vanquish Omnipotence? Why, then, give place to fear while he is with you in the ship?

IV. Jesus not only comforts his troubled disciples by his presence, *he also gloriously delivers them by his power.* He waits, indeed, till his help is called for. He will be inquired of to do this for them. But never so soundly does he sleep, as not to have an ear open to the cry: "Lord, save us, we perish." And feeble as faith may be, if only it is sufficient to bring to him, he will never disappoint it, or refuse its prayers. The faith of these troubled ones was small. It was not able to lay hold of the comforting pledge of safety which Jesus' presence furnished. But it led them in their extremity to call on him, to lay their desperate condition before him, and to look at last to him whom they should have hopefully kept in view from the beginning. And "he arose, and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm." The tempest retired to its silent caves; the waves sunk down to their quiet beds; the spirit of discord was cast out; and the disciples could only wonder at the sublime deliverance which was wrought.

Behold in this the picture of what he is ready and able to do for every troubled soul that flies to him in its distresses, and what he is pledged to do for his persecuted Church and people. There is not a storm that he will not allay, nor a despairing spirit that he is not prepared to rescue, if only his help is earnestly and believingly sought. You may think your sins are great and many; but his blood can wash them all away. You may think your unholy heart too intractable to be mastered; but he can quench its love of sin, and bind its unruly passions fast forever. You may think your sorrows too great for cure, and your case too desperate for salvation; but his word can bring you instant deliverance. And all those troubles which you so bitterly complain of, he can calm to a peace as sweet as Eden.

Christ's help may not be given just as and when we desire; but, if earnestly and believingly sought, it will come. No powers can hinder it. He who can command the wind and the sea, can also command the forces requisite to all our wants.

Christ's help may be long deferred; but if earnestly and believingly sought, it will be timely. It is nearest when most needed, and most effective when most required. Though he sleeps while we toil and struggle, he is awake and potent in the moment of extremity.

Christ's help may be looked for tremblingly; but if really implored as the only hope, it will be complete. Not a wave will it leave to be battled

with. Not a fear will it permit to remain to ripple the unbroken calm; nor a breath of adversity to disturb any more the complete repose.

Many and great are the sorrows, commotions, and fears which beset us in life's trying voyage. We are set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that, by reason of the frailty of our nature, we cannot always stand upright. But this morning's Gospel discloses to us the blessed source of strength and protection to support us in all our perils, and carry us safely through all temptations. Troubled soul, hast thou considered who is with thee in the ship? Hast thou gone, in thine unequal contests with storm and trial, to that blessed Saviour who calmly waits to hear and to help thee? Believest thou that all fears and griefs must yield to his sovereign word? Canst thou not see in Jesus an ample, present, and willing Deliverer? Why, then, dost thou fear, O thou of little faith?

Hold *on*, faint heart, in thy believing!
The steadfast, only, wins the crown;
He who, when stormy waves are heaving,
Parts with his anchor, shall go down;
But he who Jesus holds through all,
Shall stand, though earth and heaven should fall.

Hold *in* thy murmurs, Heaven arraigning!
The patient see God's loving face!
Who bear their burdens uncomplaining,
'Tis they that win the Father's grace;
He wounds himself who braves the rod,
And sets himself to fight with God.

Hold *out!* There comes an end to sorrow;
Hope, from the dust, shall conquering rise;
The storm foretells a sunnier morrow;
The cross points on to Paradise.
The Father reigneth; cease all doubt;
Hold on, faint heart, hold in, hold out!

In the midst of storms and tempests, let the voice of thy supplications go up to Him who rules the raging of the sea, and stills the rising waves. In thy heart believe that His word can also give thee peace. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

V. Finally, this miracle on Galilee gives us the prophecy and foreshadowing of the blessedness which Christ's finished work is to bring to the world, and to those who embark with him in the voyage of life. One word expresses it. It is PEACE. To disturbed and troubled nature—PEACE. To fearful and distressed hearts—PEACE. To groaning and suffering creation—everlasting PEACE. From Jesus of Nazareth there is yet to go forth upon the winds and the waves a new command, to silence their disastrous commotions, to tune creation's loosened strings to their primeval harmony, to put off from nature the ashen garments of her humiliation which have been on her for these six thousand years, and to spread over all this universal scene of things "a great calm," amid which Christ shall stand out in the glory of undisputed Lordship, and his rescued people kneel around in adoring wonder, as bliss-

ful as it is sublime. Blessed, blessed consummation of this weary and troubled world! What a change shall it bring! What scenes of glory beyond all that eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart of man conceived, shall it reveal!

Here, our hands are clasped in weeping,
Through earth's dark and dreary night;
There, they shall be ever sweeping
Harps of gold in perfect light.

Here, our eyes with tears are streaming,
Looking for some resting-place;
There, they shall with joy be beaming,
Gazing on a Father's face.

Here, our bleeding feet are threading
Tangled mazes, dark and drear;
There, they shall be ever treading
Blooming fields, by waters clear.

Here, our brows lie low in anguish,
Oft with grief and care bowed down;
There, no head with pain shall languish,
Each shall wear a golden crown.

Here, the soul in secret tosses,
Oft with wounds too deep to heal;
But no long-borne lonely crosses,
Will those blood-washed robes conceal.

Here, is sinning, struggling, doubting,
Mid temptations fierce and sore;
There, triumphant hosts are shouting
"Victory!" "Victory!" evermore.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATT. 13 : 24–30. Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field : but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

LL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Tim. 3: 16, 17. But there are no portions of the Scriptures of truth, so radiant with light, so simple yet so sublime, or around which the faith, and hope, and interest of the Christian world in all ages have clustered with so much delight, as the Parables of Jesus. They are a distinct portion of literature, unlike everything else in all the utterances or records of man, and an independent and original creation of the Son of God. They are loftier vehicles of truth

than fables, and present an impressive naturalness, by the side of which even Æsop's best appear like monstrosities. They are baskets of earth, transfigured by celestial genius and glory, and filled with the bread of life—consecrated messengers of the common world to herald and display the wisdom and goodness of heaven. And prominent among them is the parable of the wheat and tares, set forth in this morning's Gospel.

There has been some misunderstanding and debate as to what is meant by the *field* to which the Saviour here refers. Some take it to mean *the Church*—the community of professing Christians—the society of those who have openly confessed themselves to be the followers of Christ. Others have taken it as denoting Christendom in a more enlarged sense, embracing the whole population upon Christian territory, or enjoying the benefits of Christian institutions—the assemblage of nations, states, or peoples, in which Christianity is the dominant religion. It would seem, however, that the Saviour has sufficiently settled the question, where he explains to the disciples that "*the field is the world*"—ὁ κοσμος—the sum total of living men, the kingdoms of which the tempter pointed out from the mountain-top, into which the apostles were to go and preach the Gospel, to which the Saviour came, and which knew him not, though he himself had made it. It is true, that the stress of the parable falls particularly upon the visible Church; but to

confine such a word to the limits of the organized Christian society, would be to stint and pervert its meaning. It includes the whole world of humanity, good and bad.

Nor does it alter the case, that it is represented as *Christ's* field. His spiritual farm takes in the whole world of men. He made it; he has bought it with his blood; and he has comprehended every acre of it in the commands which he has given his servants concerning it. In every form of admeasurement, the dispensation of his Gospel is commensurate with it. And there is not a section, nook, or corner of it, which his commissions and promises do not reach as the chosen glebe for his gracious sowing and final reaping. It is folly to attempt to get away from words so plain. "THE FIELD IS THE WORLD." Looking, then, at what is said with regard to this field, we find *two Planters; two Growths; two Policies;* and *a most eventful Consummation;* to each of which we may profitably direct our meditations.

I. THE TWO PLANTERS.—"He that soweth the good seed is *the Son of man.*" This identifies one of them. "But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." "The enemy that sowed them is *the devil.*" This identifies the other. Both are sowers. Both plant seeds. Both behold fruit as the product of their endeavors. In all other respects, however, they are very different.

1. The one is good and beneficent. He cultivates his own rightful possessions. He employs his means, powers and activities in the production and multiplication of what enters most largely into the supplies for the necessities, comfort and wealth of the community. He acts as a gracious benefactor. The other is only malignant. Having left his own estate, he obtrudes himself upon what belongs to another. His efforts are not to help and bless, but to hinder, destroy, and disappoint. He is "*an enemy*"—the common foe of all good—the malicious sower of deceiving and hurtful tares in the wheat-field of the righteous one. There can be nothing more base than the wilful injury of another's crops. It is a great sin, not only against the rights and beneficent endeavors of a neighbor, but also against the common weal, and the very sustenance and life of the community. Yet, so good and gracious is the Son of man on the one side, and so evil and misanthropic is the devil on the other. The one is a Planter for the world's good; the other, for the world's ruin.

2. The Planter of good is *first;* the planter of evil comes after. In the Oriental world, even to this day, the honest agriculturist who happens to have an enemy, is watched by that enemy until he has his field ploughed, and his good seed sown, and then comes the stealthy foe and oversows it with some noxious product. And so the parable represents the doings of Satan. Man was created

and endowed for blessedness. The field of original humanity was carefully planted for a joyous fruitfulness. This was all done before Satan appeared upon the scene, though meanwhile watching the proceeding with a malicious eye. The Lord had made ready the soil, and sown it with good, and holy angels were singing over it with joy and thanksgiving, before the devil came, and commenced sowing his deleterious seeds. There was blessedness before there was misery. The primordial condition is one of goodness. Evil is spoliation; and there must always be a preceding good to be spoiled, before it can come into play. It is a parasite, which can only exist by fastening on something better than itself going before it. And as Satan followed the planting in Eden, so he follows every holy and gracious planting. He is always on the heels of activity for good, and is the most busy where there is the most gracious effort. We hear nothing of "Elymas the sorcerer," till Paul came to Paphos preaching the word of God, nor of false Christs till after the true had come. And it is always when men are awakened so as to begin to look about them for salvation, that they are in the greatest danger of embracing falsehood. When Christ passes, the devil may be expected.

3. The Planter of good does his work openly, in the eyes of all. He ploughs his field, and sows his seed, not caring who sees it, or who knows it. The planter of evil selects the night-time, and

goes forth when honest eyes are closed for honest sleep, and does his work, and departs with all possible secrecy. It is the nature of good and truth to be frank and open. Christ did not hide in the wilderness, nor send his apostles to obscure corners, nor give forth his Gospel only to such as had been first secretly initiated. He went up upon the mountain side, and propounded his Gospel in all circles, and sent his messengers to the cities, and commanded them to preach out his truth to all men. Falsehood and sin are always cowardly. Untruth shuns the daylight, and is full of dissimulation to keep its real character concealed. It is where intellect is feeblest and most asleep that it seeks to plant itself first. Satan goes to the woman in Adam's absence, and creeps into Corinth after Paul has left, and goes round to pervert the unsuspecting peasants whilst Luther is in the Wartburg. And the man who is shy of his confession in the presence of others, can never be safely trusted. He who sows clandestinely follows the devil's method, and the chances are that he is in the devil's service.

II. The Two Growths. — The Son of man sowed good seed—"*wheat*"—the most precious of grains, on which life principally depends. The growth from this good seed embraces "the children of the kingdom"—the true members of the Church and heirs of glory—those who receive the truth into good and honest hearts, nourish it unto fruitfulness, and are accepted as the elect

of God. This is the good growth. The other is of a different sort. The enemy sows according to his enmity—not good seed, for that would defeat his malice; but "tares"—ζιζάνια—a deleterious grass, the seeds of which are intoxicating, poisonous, producing the most distressing symptoms, and even death. Volney tells of the ill effects which he experienced in eating of them. (Trav. 2, p. 306.) The name the Saviour gives them is from an Arabic word (*zân*), denoting nausea. They are a noxious weed, unfit for food, unwholesome, and dangerous. They still abound in Syria and Palestine, to the great annoyance of the farmer, and to this day bear a name much the same in sound as that which the Saviour uses. The products of this seed stand in the parable for "the children of the wicked one." Some take these to be only false Christians, hypocrites, apostates from the true faith, and injurious corrupters of the pure Gospel. This would well accord with the view which regards the tares as bastard or degenerate wheat. But there are many other "children of the wicked one," besides false Christians and heretics. Nor must it be overlooked, that these tares grew not from the good seed, or from anything that dropped from the hand of the sower of the wheat, but from a seed of their own, which another hand had scattered. Rather should we see in this detestable growth all grades, classes, and kinds of people, who "are of their father the devil;" although, as this evil seed is found in the Church, it must needs have the guise and profes-

sion of Christianity; for where there is no profession, there is no Church which man can see and know. We thus find the parable setting forth two very different growths, concerning which we may further remark:

1. *They are intermingled in the same field*—"tares among the wheat"—"both together." There has never been a sowing of God on earth, but it has been oversown by Satan; or a growth for Christ with which the plantings of the wicked one have not mingled. Good seed was sown in Paradise, but when the product appeared the tares were there. There were saints in every age, but never where they were not mixed with abounding tares. In all ages and dispensations, the plants of grace have ever found the plants of evil by their sides, their roots intertwining, and their stalks, and leaves and fruits putting forth together upon the same territory. Even the Church itself has ever found a Judas with its apostles; an Ananias, Demas, and Simon Magus among its professed converts; an Antichrist confronting its Christ, and a Man of sin in the very temple of its highest devotions. He who sets out to find a perfect Church in this world, ventures upon a hopeless search. Go where he will, worship where he may, there will be tares with the wheat, sin mingled with all earthly holiness, self-deceivers and hypocrites in every assembly of the saints, and black sheep in every flock. No preaching, however pure and faithful, no discipline, however strict

and prudent, no watchfulness however careful and searching, can ever make it otherwise. As long as Satan is at large, he will sow his tares; and, generally, those who claim to have the least, are really growing the most.

2. *They are hard to distinguish.* When come to maturity, they are readily known; but while growing, the two are so much alike that the closest scrutiny often cannot decide which is which. Dr. Thomson, for thirty years a resident in Syria, says, "I cannot detect them at all with any confidence. Even the farmers, who in this country generally weed their fields, do not attempt to separate the one from the other. They would mistake good grain for them." (Land and Book, 2, p. 111.) Hence one reason of the prohibition, not to attempt to separate them. It was manifest to the servants that tares were in the field. This they could detect. But just exactly what was from the good seed, and what from the bad, they had not the requisite sagacity to tell. And just so subtly does Satan simulate what is good. It is often for the time out of the question to detect his falsehoods. Even the mother of us all, when yet pure and sinless, embraced his lies, supposing them to be truth. Sometimes we may think that we are gazing upon an angel of light, when we are admiring the very devil himself. 2 Cor. 11: 14. Naked evil can deceive no one. Only when it simulates good, and embodies itself in the forms which resemble wheat, can it gain stand

ing and acceptance. It, therefore, pertains to its nature to clothe itself in the livery and coloring of what is virtuous and precious, deceiving, if it were possible, the very elect. How often do those whom people take for the veriest saints, afterwards turn out to be the infamous seed of Satan! How often those who are the least suspected of special devotedness, are finally manifested as the very jewels of the Saviour! And until things come to maturity, it is impossible to tell one from the other with any degree of certainty. The Scribes and Pharisees of the Saviour's time seemed to be wheat, and yet they were tares; and the publicans and sinners were set down as tares, yet many of them proved to be most fruitful and blessed plants of grace and righteousness.

3. Still another noticeable particular is, that *both grow*. Either good or evil finds in man a congenial soil. And as the seeds of both have been sown in that soil, both have taken root, and both develop and increase together. There is a theory afloat in the world, which has unfortunately taken hold of many well-meaning people, that the wheat will indeed increase, but the tares decrease, until, finally, good alone takes possession of the field, and Christianity celebrates its Millennium of triumph. But this parable gives the direct contradiction to all such imaginings. "The harvest is the end of the age," when Christ comes with his mighty angels to judge the world; and until

that solemn harvest, the Saviour tells us, "*both* GROW *together.*" Never, in the present order of things, shall we see all the inhabitants of the earth, or even the general body of them, the wheat of God. Greatly has the wheat grown, and greatly will it continue to grow, as the faithful sowing proceeds. But the tares have quite kept pace with it, and will continue to increase and develop with equal vigor and luxuriance. With all the growth of piety and the expansion of the Church, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." 2 Tim. 3:13. And the last days shall be the worst days, when the Church itself shall be overrun with iniquity, and men who profess the name of Christ "shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, . . having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3:1–5. Tares are by nature a hardier plant than wheat, and as there is to be no ereption of them before the harvest of judgment, so they will never be brought under while this present αἰων lasts. Milton has rightly versified what the Scriptures give us to expect upon this subject. So far from the contents of the whole field becoming wheat,

> Truth shall retire
> Bestuck with slanderous darts, and works of faith
> Rarely be found; so shall the world go on,
> To good malignant, to bad men benign,
> Under her own weight groaning, till the day
> Appear, of reparation to the just,
> And vengeance of the wicked, at return
> Of Him—thy Saviour and thy Lord.

III. The Two Policies.—As soon as the two sowings had sufficiently developed to make it manifest that the field had tares, the servants of the farmer proposed to go and pluck them out from among the wheat. Their idea seems to have been to clear the field entirely of their presence, to free the Church from all spurious Christians and the world of all children of the wicked one. Some think that the spirit of punitive violence was embraced in their proposal, and that it involved the destruction of the wicked by physical force. It looked, at any rate, to very extreme proceedings to displace all tares. This was one policy. But to this the master of the plantation gave an emphatic "Nay; let both grow together until the harvest." This was not meant to prohibit endeavors to root the tares of evil out of our own hearts and lives, for this is a duty elsewhere plainly enough enjoined; nor yet to forbid the exercise of reasonable and wholesome discipline in the Church, or the exercise of punitive power in the State, both of which are elsewhere recognized as just and good; nor yet to discourage moral efforts connected with the preaching of the Word, and the dissemination of light and truth, by which to convert sinners, and thus destroy evil in the world, for this is specifically commanded. The "Nay" reaches only extreme and summary proceedings to break up all admixtures of good and bad, so as unmistakably to have a Church of none but saints, and a world of none but Christians. It is a "Nay" which stays from too much

rigidness in excommunicating suspected persons, and too much ultraism and severity in the punishment of evil-doers. It is a "Nay," which leaves the field unrid of tares, and the Church and the world still full of intermingled good and evil. Here, then, are the two Policies, concerning which it remains to be remarked,

1. That of the servants is natural, and seemingly founded on a just zeal for what is good; but it is very unwise and hurtful. When we fall upon inconsistency and unfaithfulness among professing Christians, our first impulse is to bring them to strict account, and to separate them from all merciful consideration and fellowship. People say, they cannot belong to a Church which permits such and such characters to be in it, and are for visiting condign punishment upon every offender. But it is a short-sighted and mischievous zeal. The Saviour himself here represents it as hardly less injurious than the enemy's positive malignity. Nor has the cause of Christ suffered more from any source, than from the spurious or misdirected zeal of its own friends. Satan has done quite as much mischief by the fury which he excites against the tares, as by his clandestine sowing of them. We have not had the powers of the great Judge committed to us. We have not the proper qualifications to make a just discrimination. Hence we are to "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make

manifest the counsels of the hearts." 1 Cor. 4: 5. We cannot be sufficiently certain which are tares or which are wheat. We are liable to take one for the other, and in trying to gather out the tares, it is certain that we will necessarily "root up also the wheat with them." Some of those whom false zeal would pluck up, after all have the root of the matter in them. Some of them, though tares now, by being left to the gracious influences about them, will become wheat. And to be too extreme with those who never will be anything but tares, would so loosen, disturb and distract things, that much that is wheat would needs be damaged and hindered more than if no such violence were done. The disciples thought they would be doing God service by calling down fire on the inhospitable Samaritans; but they knew not what manner of spirit they were of. Luke 9: 54, 55. Had their impulse prevailed, what a harvest, subsequently gathered for the Church from among these selfsame Samaritans by the ministry of Philip, would have been lost! Acts 8: 5–8.

2. The Policy of the Master, though more mysterious and perplexing, is far better. It leaves things less satisfactory for the time, but accomplishes the greatest good in the end. It brings to final salvation many who would otherwise go down to everlasting burning. And even many who are not true Christians themselves, by being left undisturbed, are often of great service to the

Christian cause. Though tares, their leaves help to shade the ground, and protect the roots of better growths. Their gifts and contributions count in the treasury of the Lord, though they be not of His true saints. And they are at any rate better for being left in the field among the wheat, than if they were harshly expelled. There is also a wholesome and invigorating discipline imposed upon the good by the presence of the tares, which would otherwise be wanting. Even false Christians have their mission. The very treachery of Judas carried lessons with it, which have been as powerful and salutary upon believers as the most edifying conduct of the most devoted disciple. And the lessons of patience, forbearance, mercy, watchfulness, and earnest Christian endeavor, which the presence of the tares gives to believers, is worth more than would be gained by the wisest attempts of man to rid the field of them. Accordingly,

3. The Policy of the Master is that which prevails, and which will prevail, despite all efforts to the contrary, even to the end of the age. His word has gone out: "*Let both grow together until the harvest;*" and so they have been growing together ever since. For eighteen hundred years of Christian effort and experience, there has never been a nation, state, city, neighborhood, or village, anywhere under heaven, in which every individual was a true member of Christ. Even in the hands of inspired Apostles, whose very words

were miracles, the Gospel nowhere made saints of all, or even of all who confessed themselves to it. And that which hath been, is that which shall be. A perfect church, or a converted world, we shall never see this side the day of judgment. Man, in his infidel reasoning may say, "Then Christianity is a failure. It set out to make saints of all men and to subdue the world to Christ, and it cannot convert all its own professors!" But both the premises and the conclusion of such arguing are wrong. The sort of failure alleged, is exactly what the great Author of Christianity affirmed from the beginning. He said that tares would always be among the wheat, and that the devil would have his seed in the world and in the Church to the very end of the dispensation, and that the two implantations would grow together until the harvest, which is the day of judgment. Things thus far have turned out exactly as he represented, and so pledge to us the fulfilment of the picture for whatever period the present order may yet have to run.

IV. The Ultimate Consummation.—Though the wheat and tares grow together, they will not always be together. There is to come an end to this αἰων. There is a harvest appointed when an administration of righteous judgment shall rectify all present inequalities. And a great and marvellous harvest it shall be—the harvest of an entire dispensation—the harvest of all this world's matured good and evil—the harvest which con-

cludes this mingled life and begins the αἰῶνες of immortality.

1. Note the reapers—not the "servants;"—even when wheat and tares have come to ripeness, so important a work cannot be intrusted to their hands. Mightier strength and higher wisdom than theirs is needed. Nothing less than heavenly clearness, calmness, decision, purity, and power will answer. "The reapers are the angels"—those holy, blessed, and mighty beings who sprung up in the morning of eternity, and have ever played so conspicuous a part in the administrations of God—who have ever so gently and lovingly served the saints in every age, bringing them deliverance in their needs and avenging them of their enemies—who smote Egypt in her first-born, and struck the fetters from Peter's captive limbs, and carried Lazarus to his heavenly rest. From their celestial homes the Son of man shall send them forth to gather out of His kingdom every offensive thing, and to reap the harvest of the earth. No danger that they shall err, or be disheartened at the combinations of the wicked, or deal without proper carefulness for the precious wheat of God. Safe in their hands shall be all the interests of the saints; and with unswerving fidelity will they do the righteous bidding of their Lord and ours.

2. Note the commands which they execute: "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them

in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Great, solemn, awful commission! Whatever is heterogeneous, is to be separated; and whatever is homogeneous is to be put together. Families whose members differ in faith and holiness are to be rent asunder for ever. The stocks of tares and wheat that stand and grow together on the same spot, and whose roots and leaves overlap and intertwine, are then to be everlastingly severed. And saints of God who never met before shall then come lovingly together to share each other's bliss. Henceforward there will be only tares with tares, and wheat with wheat. Then all incongruous mixture ceases. Then the glory of the wicked ends, and the proper glory of the saints begins. Three words tell the fate of the wicked. The Lord says, *Gather* them, *Bind* them, *Burn* them; and all beyond is "a furnace of fire," "wailing and gnashing of teeth." Some tell us there is no such thing as hell; but with these words before us, let him risk it who will, I will not.

3. Note the final result. The tares disposed of, and the wheat gathered, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." O the treasures of blessedness which are bodied forth in these few words! It is a mercy to live in a good kingdom. It is a greater mercy to live in a Father's loving care. Yet here is a kingdom good, its King our Father, His glory our glory, His joy our joy. Nor yet as

stars and children in this heavenly realm are the righteous, but they "shine as the sun." How pure the sun! How unstained and untarnishable his rays! How exalted and useful! The centre of congregations of revolving orbs! the source of light, beauty and bliss to many worlds! the very monarch of day, and object of universal admiration, whose splendors never decrease, and whose glory never fades! No wonder that so many people have bent their knees in lowly homage to its rising beams, and worshipped it as the God of gods! But "the righteous shall shine forth *as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father."

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." 1 John 3: 2, 3.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MATT. 17 : 1–9. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them : and his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light.

And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

ONE of the mightiest events in the history of our glorious Lord and Saviour, and one which wonderfully manifested forth his glory, was that mysterious occurrence described in the Gospel now before us. It was a most significant epiphany, the very culmination of his earthly epiphanies, and well placed by the Church as a preface to those scenes of humiliation and suffering in which he is next to be contemplated. And yet it only once in a long while comes before us in the regularly-appointed lessons.

Some have also questioned whether it is to be received as real history. Rationalism calls it "The Dream of Peter." Some talk of it as a mere scenic display, to awaken the dull and sleepy disciples, but of no further moment or significance. Even some comparatively sound theologians have satisfied themselves with assigning it a basis of historic truth, but much exaggerated by the dreamy imaginations of the witnesses. But any view which takes the words of the description as in excess of the facts, is to be suspected, and generally has at the bottom of it some false or defective Christology, and introduces a way of dealing with sacred language which puts all faith in jeopardy. I take the account as literally and historically true, and cannot consent to listen to any interpretation which denies that the events transpired exactly as they are narrated. A dream! It is not likely that three men would each dream precisely the same thing, at the same time; or that they would all be so perfectly deceived as to tell it for fact in their most serious discourses and writings. Nor do I know by what authority we are to regard that as a dream, which the record says the witnesses beheld when they were wide awake. "When they were *awake*, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." Men do not usually dream such things with their eyes open, and standing on their feet. And if it had been a mere trance vision or prophetic ecstasy, we would naturally look for some indication to that effect, as in all other cases of the kind. But no such

indication is given. Three evangelists tell of the glorious wonder, and all of them in a style significant of full persuasion that the thing about which they were writing was a matter of unmistakable historical verity. Peter, in his second Epistle, also refers to it, with the express asseveration, that nothing of the nature of fable had the least connection with it, and that it was a matter of fact to which he was himself an eye-witness. 2 Pet. 1 : 16–18. And if it was the mere dream of the apostles, why did the Saviour speak to them so seriously about it, and charge them so particularly not to tell it until after his resurrection from the dead? Nay more, if it was a mere play upon the imaginations of the apostles, for their own particular confirmation, the difficulty arises of harmonizing it with right moral principles, and of accounting for the very prominent and reiterated references to it in the New Testament. If the witnesses were deceived into the reception of an unreal vision or dream, for historical fact, it will be hard to exculpate Christ from the charge of delusion and fraud to beget faith, or to relieve the sacred histories from the suspicion of being, after all, a mere collection of fabulous and uncertain records. There certainly is nothing affirmed of Christ, which stands upon a surer historic basis, than his Transfiguration.

One of the most illogical things in the world, is this tinkering at acknowledged Revelation. There is nothing more irrational than Rationalism itself. If we are not to receive the Bible until we have

first mended it, or until we have constructed some invention of our own by which to sift out its truth from its alleged falsehood; and if we are not to admit its repeated statements until we have rasped them into agreement with our preconceptions of credibility, then logical consistency requires that we refuse to regard it as a Revelation at all. There is no landing-place between receiving it in its plain and ascertainable grammatical meaning, and the putting of it on a level with other books. If we are satisfied that its records have been given by inspiration of God, we must needs insist that what it relates as fact, is fact. Either let go the idea of its Divinity altogether, or accept what it says without modification or abatement. There is no other honest or legitimate way of dealing with it. And as we have confidence in the Scriptures as the word of God, let us not hesitate to accept the text as true history, and proceed to consider it as such.

The subject, as it comes before us, is, the glorious Transfiguration of our Lord, concerning which we may profitably notice,

I. *The Place;*
II. *The Witnesses;*
III. *The Transformation;*
IV. *The Time;*
V. *The accompanying Apparitions;*
VI. *The particular significance of the whole.*

I. *The Place.* This is specifically described as "up in an high mountain." No particular moun-

tain is named. The tradition that it was Tabor, does not date further back than the fourth century. There is an older opinion, that it was the Mount of Olives; but that is not "an high mountain," and there is nothing to show that Christ was in the neighborhood of Jerusalem at the time. We may therefore conclude that it was not Olivet; and it is barely possible that it could have been Mount Tabor, which has but a narrow summit, and was at the time occupied as a military stronghold. A few days before, the Saviour and his disciples were in "the coasts of Cesarea Philippi," and near the foot of the highest and most marked mountain of Palestine. In it were to be found both the superior elevation, and the peaceful seclusion, best answering to the narrative. And all the probabilities point to this Mount Hermon, from whose base the Jordan springs, as the mountain in question.

There is much said in the Scriptures about mountains, and many of the most memorable events of sacred history transpired upon mountains. The Law was given on a mountain. Christ's great discourse, which gave the principles of the new economy, was delivered on a mountain. The last decisive conflict with the prophets of Baal, and the last of the three great conflicts of the Saviour with Satan, occurred on mountains. The offering up of Isaac, the great type, and the subsequent offering up of Christ, to which it pointed, both were accomplished on mountains. A large portion of our Saviour's par-

ticular devotions was performed on the mountains. The vision of the New Jerusalem was vouchsafed to Ezekiel and to John from "a very high mountain." And so Jesus was transfigured on a mountain, ascended to heaven from a mountain, and will appear again, at his second coming, on a mountain; for "his feet shall stand upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east." **Zech. 14 : 4.**

All this is not mere accident. Mountainous elevations are particularly fitted to the sacred and the Divine. They are Nature's symbols of the majesty of God. They have a natural harmony with his everlasting purity, power, and Godhead. "All that expands the spirit, yet appals, gathers round their summits." Who that has ever been among the Alps, and gazed up those glorious hills, so high that heavenly purity covers them forever, so exalted that crystal seas like necklaces hang in festoons over their shoulders, and so familiar with heaven, that the winged clouds, those virgin daughters of the sunny sky, come and throw their white arms round them and load them daily with their loving caresses, and not had his soul filled with admiring awe, and stirred with involuntary anthems to the sublime majesty of Him who built them, and to whom their worlds of rock, and ice, and snow, and torrents, and thunders ever testify? O, there is a wakening on those mighty hills, a kindling with the spirit of the morn. Palestine has no elevations of such colossal heights and dimensions; but still it has

many glorious holy mountains, striking to the eye, impressive to the heart, and full of native sublimity to direct the thoughts and feelings heavenward and Godward. "Towering above the smoke and stir of this dim and lower earth, advancing their heads into a purer atmosphere, and one nearer to heaven, they have in them a sort of natural *sursum corda*, which constitutes them fittest spots for such nearer commerce with God, or special communications from him." Moriah, Sinai, Nebo, Zion, Tabor, Hermon, Calvary, and Olivet, each have a natural harmony with the sacred scenes of which they have been the theatres. They seem holy, even without their historic interest; and linked as they have been with the most sacred associations of earth, there plays around them an impressive charm beyond the classic Parnassus, Ida, Pelion, or Olympus, and from their summits there now pours down an everlasting stream of inspiration for pious souls, before which Himalayas, Alps and Andes sink into insignificance.

II. *The Witnesses.* These were not many. Not all the apostles, even, were present. We read of but three, "Peter, James, and John his brother." No more were necessary. Of old it had been ordained, that in the mouths of two or three witnesses any matter of fact is sufficiently substantiated. And as these three were about to witness the depths of their Master's humiliation, it was fitting, if not necessary to their confirmation, that

they should be forearmed by beholding his Divine glory. They were also possessed of a superior degree of zeal and love for their Lord and his cause. Peter's affection was severely probed, but passed into the record to his everlasting credit. John's devotion so commended him to the Saviour, that he was known as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." And the great steadfastness and distinguished earnestness of James appear in the fact that he was the first of the apostles who laid down his life for his Lord. Acts 12:1. There may also have been some natural characteristics, and specialties of future office, to which the Saviour had regard in this selection. Not all the disciples of Jesus occupied the same degree of nearness to him. There were different circles, even within the little circle of the twelve, to which different degrees of privilege and trust were given. John was his bosom friend; and Peter, James and John appear on several occasions as the elect of the elect. Chrysostom calls them "the coryphæi," and Trench, "the flower and crown of the apostolic band." They, of the twelve, seem to have been the closest to their Lord, and most confided in by him. They alone were present when the daughter of Jairus was restored to life. They alone beheld the Saviour's agony in the garden. And they alone were the witnesses of the Transfiguration.

Not all the members of our natural bodies have the same functions, or the same honor; and so the members of Christ "have not all the same

office." Though there is in all the same Spirit, and one Lord is the Lord of them all; yet, "there are diversities of gifts," and differences of administrations, and varieties of operations. The law of Christian grace, like the law of natural life, is that of mutual dependence, and mutual service; according to which it is necessary that some should be endowed with gifts and functions which others have not, and that the peculiar gifts of each should supplement the particular graces of all the rest. It is the common experience of the Church in all ages, answering to the Divine exposition of the economy of the body of Christ, that to one is given the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the gifts of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. 1 Cor. 12 : 4–31. There were, therefore, also distinctions and discriminations among the apostles themselves. And yet, we are to covet earnestly the best gifts; and ever, as we improve what we have, additions will be made, and we shall have more and more.

III. *The Transformation.* The record here is brief, but exceedingly expressive. "He was transfigured before them." There was a wonderful and luminous change in the appearance of

the Saviour. The word in the text, and in Mark, is, that he was *metamorphosed.* He was glorified, shining with celestial radiance. Luke says, "The fashion of his countenance was altered." He no longer looked like the same being. Some faint prophetic anticipation of what occurred was realized in the case of Moses coming down from the mount, when "the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him." Ex. 34 : 29, 35. Stephen, in his martyrdom, also exhibited something of the sort, so that those who looked upon him "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Acts 16 : 15. But the superiority of this transformation in the appearance of Christ was in proportion to his superiority to all his servants, whether of the Old Testament or the New. The brightness of the face of Moses would seem to have been only skin deep, and taken on from without; but Christ's "face did shine *as the sun.*" The light streamed as if from its primal orb. It was only the face of Moses that was luminous. With his countenance veiled, the glory was veiled. But, in the Transfiguration of Christ, the effulgence extended to the whole form; and earthly clothing or drapery, so far from concealing it, became partaker of it. His very garments glowed with burning light and glory. And so intense and transcendent was the Divine splendor which permeated and enveloped him, that the evangelists labor, and seem at a loss for words and images, to describe it. They pile together the most expressive terms and figures known to man, and

then seem to feel as if they had not told half the reality. They say that he shone, as if from an inward fountain of light and radiating brightness. They say that "his raiment was white—shining—glistering." To this they add the intensifying adjective that it was "*exceeding* white." Still further they add two images, one from the world of nature, and another from human art. The Saviour's vesture was not only white, but "white *as snow, so as no fuller on earth could white them.*" And not content with having exhausted this world's resources for the enrichment of the description, they rise to the sky, and institute comparison with the splendors of the attire of Deity, and tell us that it was "*white as the Light.*"

The probabilities are, that it was in the night-time that this marvellous Transfiguration occurred. Luke speaks of "the next day, when they were come down from the hill;" which would most naturally imply that they spent the night in the mountain, and that this wonderful spectacle was vouchsafed during the night. This would also help to explain the drowsiness of the three disciples, and accord with the "bright cloud" to which reference is made, and which would seem to mark the whole as a night scene. This would infinitely enhance the magnificence of the manifestation, though quite enough to shame the brightness of the sun at noon. There stood the Master, in the midst of nature's darkness, gradually lifted up, perhaps, from the earth, his face shining as the brightness of a Syrian sun, and from head to

foot arrayed with the breaking forth of inward light, glowing through his garments, glorifying his very raiment, and transforming his whole appearance into that of unapproachable Godhead. On earth there has been but one such a sight.

IV. *The time*, particularly as related to the act in which the Saviour was occupied. It is said by Luke, that one object of the retirement to this mountain solitude, was "*to pray.*" And what they ascended the mountain to do, they did. They went there to pray, and there they did pray. From that high altar, the voice of Jesus went up to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. From among the rocks his supplications ascended. For what he prayed, we are not told. Like those other prayers of his, which John has preserved to us, they doubtless had more reference to his followers, and to his Church, than to himself. But, whatever the subject was, he prayed; "*and as he prayed*, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." Luke 9 : 28, 29.

Prayer is a transfiguring power. It is the opening of the earthly nature to the inflowing of the heavenly. It was converse with God, which caused the face of Moses to shine. It was with the voice of supplication on his lips, that Stephen's face became like the face of an angel. And it was in the midst of his addresses to the Father Almighty, that the blessed Jesus was so marvellously transformed and transfused with the glory

of God. Prayer is the drawing near of the soul to the light and majesty of heaven, and always gathers to itself the gilding of that light It is indeed the kindling and life of heaven in the heart of the suppliant; and the more earnest and absorbing it is, the more it transfuses with what is heavenly. It not only ascends to heaven, but it calls heaven into itself, and illumines with the grace of heaven, and makes, not only the face, but the whole man, more heavenly. It is the sublimest link of living connection with the glory and blessedness of eternity. It not only "climbs the ladder Jacob saw," but, nurtured and plied to full perfection, it renders such a ladder unnecessary, joins the two worlds in one, and makes men as angels. Nor is there anything in which heaven and earth are so completely united, or in such living and transforming connection, as in this one thing of real, fervent, believing prayer.

> There, *there*, on eagle wings we soar,
> And sin and sense seem all no more;
> And heaven comes down our souls to greet,
> And glory crowns the Mercy-seat.

V. *The accompanying Apparitions.* There was wonder added to wonder. "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." However alone we may seem to be in our devotions, we are never alone. Though effectually withdrawn from this world, beings of another then join us. Jesus and his three disciples went apart by themselves; but when they were

the furthest from the view and knowledge of men, they suddenly found themselves in converse with glorified ones. True, they were men also, but they were men who had long ago ended their connection with the toils and burdens of this life. And the disciples "saw the two men that stood with him." They were not mere phantoms and scenic shadows; but real, living, and speaking beings. And they were the two greatest of men that had ever lived. The Scriptures frequently speak of "the Law and the Prophets." The head and representative of the one was Moses, and the head and representative of the other was Elijah, otherwise called Elias. The one had died more than a thousand years before, and the other had never died at all, but had been caught up to heaven alive, in a chariot of fire. And both appeared with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration.

The appearance of these sainted worthies here is full of mystery. It seems that both of them had already been admitted into the glorified life, of which the Transfiguration was an earnest and foretaste. Luke says specifically, that they "*appeared in glory.*" With respect to Elias, this is not so difficult to understand; for he had never been brought under the power of death. But the case of Moses was different. It is plainly written, that "Moses, the servant of the Lord, *died* there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord." Deut. 34: 5. Did he appear here in a disembodied state? Or, is the mystery in which the Scrip-

tures envelop his death and burial to be taken as an intimation that he only tasted death, and was then immediately withdrawn from under it, and given a resurrection in advance of other saints? Either supposition has difficulties not easily surmountable. The latter, however, would accord best with the design of the sublime manifestation, and least offend against what is taken to be the general teaching of the Scriptures. But, whatever theory we accept, the fact remains, that there was a real appearance of these two prophets, demonstrating the existence of another state of being for the saints, and that it is one of glory far superior to anything enjoyed by them in this world.

How the three disciples knew Moses and Elias, we need not inquire. The capacity to appear at all, involved also the power of making themselves known to those to whom they appeared. Such glory and power could easily awaken an intuitive recognition of the persons who possessed it. It is enough to be assured that the disciples did know them; which sufficiently settles the question of mutual recognition in the world to come. If Peter, James and John in the flesh could know prophets in glory, whom they had never before seen, much rather shall the saints in glory be able to recognize those whom they have seen and known on earth.

"*And they were talking with Jesus.*" When two or three earthly sovereigns come together to consult about questions of human politics, nations are almost breathless over the majesty and im-

portance of the convention. But a far sublimer conference is here. The heads of dispensations past, and the Head of a dispensation embracing all nations and all subsequent time, and those amid the radiance of heavenly glory, here enter into solemn converse. Never was there another colloquy so august held in the view of mortal man! Nor are we left in uncertainty as to the subject of the unexampled interlocution. There were the three greatest beings that ever wore flesh and blood. They were all arrayed in glory, the like of which does not exist under heaven. The theme that could occupy the attention of such a council, we must needs accept as the profoundest and the most significant that can engage the thoughts and interest of man. The interview was to be of short duration. There was not to be another of the sort in the whole earthly lifetime of the Saviour, or in the entire course of the dispensation. There was no time to be wasted upon topics of no special significance. And that which was singled out as the one and only subject of the sacred and solemn conversation was *the death that Christ was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* Ah, that is the theme which most astounds the universe. Heights and depths met in that event, which astonished angels, and spell-bound the genius of seraphim. That the Son of God should die at all, was a wonder. That he should die at Jerusalem, where the only true temple and worship on earth was established, was a still greater wonder. And that he should die the death of the

cross—die as one accursed of God and man—die in the place of the guilty—die to blot out the penalty due to human transgression,—here was a subject which well might draw the saints in glory from their thrones to look into it. It is the master theme of the Gospel. Salvation centres there. It is the primal spring of forgiveness and eternal life to the saved of Adam's fallen race. Men, in their deadness and sins, may not concern themselves about it, but the dwellers in heaven are moved over it, and the conferences of glory have nothing else that so intensely absorbs them. We may think but little of it, but it is without parallel in the universe, for the mysteries of goodness, glory and Godhead which therein received expression. And slight as may be the impress it makes now, as eternity rolls, ever new importance and interest for the saints of God shall gather round that awful fact,—*Christ's decease at Jerusalem.* The disciples heard it on the lips of these heavenly worthies, and it shall resound forever in all the sublimest songs of the redeemed.

VI. But, finally, *notice the particular meaning of all this.* Every incident of Christ's life was significant; and especially would we expect so marvellous an occurrence as this to be.

It had, first of all, an important relation to the foreannouncements which the Saviour had just been making of his approaching sufferings and death. Matt. 16 : 21; Mark 9 : 31; Luke 9 : 22. These sad things had greatly disturbed, perplexed,

and disheartened the disciples. The utterance of them was even offensive to some of them. Quite other ideas were in their minds, which were presently to be dashed out. And it was necessary that they should be strongly certified of the Saviour's Divine glory before he went down into those dreadful depths, lest their faith should utterly fail them when the facts should occur. Hence he took them up into the mountain to unbare to them his Divine majesty, that when they should behold him in the agonies of death, they might still have wherewith to help their faltering faith, and to anticipate better results than his utter discomfiture. Though he was to "suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed," and so disappoint the erroneous imaginings of his followers, he would thus have them assured that he nevertheless had a kingdom, and a power, and a glory, ready at any moment to burst forth, and which should in due time be revealed in all their heavenly splendors, although as yet hidden, and to become yet more profoundly veiled and seemingly overwhelmed before reaching the final manifestation.

But this was only the lowest meaning of this wonderful scene. It is to be viewed also as a stage in the mysterious development of Christ himself, of more account than his consideration for the temptations that were to befall his disciples. It was a mighty strengthening of *him*, as well as of them, for the burden of his passion—"a step in the progressive glorifying of that hu

manity which he had assumed,"—by which his human consciousness was made to realize more fully his mediatorial glory, as a preparation for his voluntary surrender to the dreadful eclipse which was soon to come. We are told that it was "for the joy that was set before him," he "endured the cross, despising the shame." Heb. 12 : 2. And here, more than in any other instance of his earthly life, was the giving to him of that blessed foretaste, and the fortifying of his human heart against the dreadfulness of the cup which he was about to drink.

And for this reason we are also fully authorized to take the Transfiguration as a picture and earnest of his future coming and kingdom, which is to embody the consummated results of his obedience unto death. If it was a foretaste and pledge of "the glory that should follow" from his sufferings, it must needs be of the same kind and nature with that of which it was a section given in advance. What marked it, must mark what is to be hereafter, and what we see in it is what we may lawfully expect when he has fully entered upon his glory. Otherwise "the joy that was set before him" was not the joy which he is actually to inherit. What appeared in the Transfiguration, then, is necessarily to be viewed as an exact rehearsal of that future kingdom which is to crown the redemption work. This also appears in the words of Christ, which all three of the accounts bring into such close relation to this marvellous occurrence. A week before, Jesus told his dis-

ciples that "the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels:" and that there were some present, when he so said, who should not taste of death till they should "*see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*" That coming and kingdom none then present did live to see, except in this precursory form on the mount of Transfiguration. We search through apostolic history in vain for anything that at all answers to the description but this. Peter also, in some sort, identifies the Transfiguration, of which he was an eyewitness, with "the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 1:16. And all the surroundings of the case are such, that it is impossible to come to any other conclusion, than that this marvellous scene, in the mind of the Saviour himself, was meant to connect with what is to be revealed hereafter in the consummation of all things. It was nothing less than the forepledge and prelibation of that very glory and kingdom to be manifested when our blessed Lord and Judge shall be revealed from heaven, as all the Scriptures teach us to expect.

Nor will it be easy for us to exaggerate the importance and preciousness of the Transfiguration in this point of view. Volumes of prophecy are embodied in it. All that reconciled the Saviour to the wondrous humiliation of the cross; all that cheered and sustained his soul as he submitted himself to the pains of hell; all that his prophets or he himself has ever promised as the portion of his saints; and all that we look forward to in

the sublime realities of eternity; we may find illustrated and heralded in this one act. As Christ appeared in the Transfiguration, so will he appear to the admiring view of his people when he comes in the glory of the Father. His face shall shine as the sun, and his raiment shall be white as the light. All the saints that sleep shall then be recovered from their graves, arrayed in glory like unto their Lord, and be with him in blessed converse, as Moses. All the saints alive and remaining at the time of his coming, shall have been "caught up" without dying at all, and united with their elder brethren in the same glory and divine fellowship, as Elijah. At their feet, beholding their glory, hearing their words, and thrilling with blessedness to the full capacity of flesh and blood, shall be earth's ransomed generations, as Peter, James, and John. And while the eternal years are measured out, the glory shall never fade, nor the felicity diminish, nor the kingdom pass away!

Brethren, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Experience has no materials, and visible creation no emblems, by which to figure out the untried forms of happy being, and cycles of unending bliss, which await the children of God. But, the Transfiguration lets us into the heights and depths of it beyond everything that has yet occurred in this world's history. And when we add to it the inspired statements, that when Christ shall appear, "we shall be like him, and see him as he is," a boundless expanse of wonders opens

to our contemplation, at which the soul thrills as it looks. O let us see to it then, promise having been left us of entering into that rest, that none of us comes short of it. If we must suffer, let us suffer; if we must deny ourselves and take up the cross, let us do it willingly; if we must resist unto blood, let us resist; and if we must die for our Lord, let us die for him; for nothing that earth can give shall ever compensate for the loss of place in that everlasting kingdom. Neither is there any privation which earth can inflict, which shall not be recompensed beyond all reckoning in that blessed world to come. God grant, that when mortal eyes again see Jesus in his glory, we may be with him, in the Moses company, if we have first to die; or in the Elijah company, if it should occur in our day! And let each take up the prayer, and cry: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!"

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

MATT. 20 : 1–16. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

THE grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking

for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Tit. 2: 11–14. It is this Grace of God, its proposals to mankind, and the conduct of men under it, that is pictured to us in this morning's Gospel. May God help us to look at it as it deserves, and to learn the lessons which it was meant to inculcate!

I. GRACE, IN ITS MOVEMENTS TOWARDS MAN.

First of all, there is the constitution of a vineyard. This goes before everything else; first in the eternal purpose of God, and then in every needful heavenly and earthly arrangement for its manifestation among men. It is a vineyard in this world, but, in some sense, divided off, and fenced in from the common waste and wildness. Under the former dispensation, the limits of this vineyard were marked by the boundaries of Israel. Thus Isaiah sings: "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes. . . . For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." Is. 5: 1–7. So, also, the Psalmist: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast

out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." Is. 80:8–11. It was God's vineyard, for the reason that there his special favor rested, and there his particular culture was bestowed. To that people "pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4), as to none else on earth. They were the chosen people of a chosen land, and spiritually favored, as well as temporally blessed, beyond all the children of men. But their unfaithfulness dispossessed them of the exclusive enjoyment of this high calling. After God had done all for his vineyard that could be done, he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. His word, therefore, went forth against the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah: "Now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste." Is. 5:4–6. All this was fulfilled after the Jewish rejection and crucifixion of Christ.

But God did not therefore withdraw from having a vineyard upon earth. Though abolishing the Jewish national distinctiveness, and the whole

economy with which it was connected, he gave new commissions, and ordained a new administration, meant to gather adherents and subjects from among all nations, on whom to show his mercy, dispense his gracious culture, and prepare for himself a people out of all peoples—a kingdom within the kingdoms—which exists to this day as the true vineyard of the Lord of hosts. In it his servants labor. On it his special favor reposes. Out of it he develops all joyous and blessed fruitfulness. And by means of it he proposes opportunities to secure a still higher and inalienable election to an immortality of glory and dominion. To this every arrangement is complete, in heaven and on earth, and in the preparation for which everything that has preceded has borne a part Commonly, this vineyard is called the Church, or Christendom, which is only properly entered by means of the Church, and which is to be found anywhere and everywhere in that community of believers among whom the Gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered as the Gospel demands. The laying out of this vineyard has been no work of man, but a thing of Divine grace only, in which it is the will and arrangement of God to let forth his choicest blessedness. And this is the first thing brought to our view in the parable before us.

2. Having constituted this vineyard, the next movement of Divine grace is to call and engage men as laborers in it. In the ordinary course of

this world, no one has any part or place in God's vineyard. As grace finds men, they are all outside of it, with no right on their part to enter, or to derive any advantage from it. But the beneficent owner designs it for these poor outsiders as well as for himself. He can make it serve them, and make it serve himself through them. He therefore goes forth into the common world to treat with men to come and labor in his vineyard, offering them a suitable sphere for their powers, and an opportunity to be at once useful in general, and gainers of profit to supply their wants and better their condition.

This call first went forth at a very early period in human history. It reached Abraham when yet in the house of idolatry, and engaged him to go forth into a country which he knew not. It reached Israel when in the bondage of Egypt, and engaged them to go up to possess and people the promised land. It found Matthew sitting at the tax-office, and engaged him to follow Jesus; and Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John, busy with their fishnets and boats on the shores of Galilee, and engaged them to go with Christ to become fishers of men. It found the three thousand on the day of Pentecost in unbelief and guiltiness of the Messiah's blood, and engaged them to repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to continue steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And so it went abroad among the nations lying in the wicked one, "from

Jerusalem round about to Illyricum," over seas, deserts, mountains, into all the world, down to this present, everywhere engaging some to turn from their idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven. Some were called at one time, and some at another; some in the morning of their lives, others in the evening of their days; some were assigned this mission, others that; some it furnished with marked endowments in one direction, and others in another direction; the Spirit of grace ever distributing his energies in infinite wisdom and mercy, to each one severally as may eventually bring forth the sublimest perfected results of the whole.

Some of the Fathers, and Vitringa in later times, apply the several hours spoken of, to particular goings forth of Divine grace in different periods of the world. They refer the "early morning," to Adam; "the third hour," to Abraham; "the sixth hour," to Moses; "the ninth hour," to the conversion of the Edomites under Hyrcanus; and "the eleventh hour," to the ministry of Christ, and the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Others press the application to the different periods of life at which different persons are reached by the Gospel, and brought to the saving knowledge of the truth. Still another class refer the hiring to the Jews, to whom a specific earthly recompense was covenanted, and the calling of the last, to whom only a general promise was given, to the offer of mercy to the Gentiles. But it is not important to settle the exact chronolog-

ical application of these several hours. There are various stages in the movements of grace, whether as respects the whole world, nations, or individuals, exhibiting ever fresh goings forth of the great Householder to secure laborers in his vineyard. The operations of mercy are not summary, but run through an extended period, giving repeated opportunities to men. And it is enough for us to be assured that there can be no mistake about the extension of this call to us. Even at this hour the will and bidding of God to all of us is: "Go ye also into the vineyard." To some it may be the first or third hour, and to others it may be the eleventh and last, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, old or young.

3. Divine grace proposes to make active servants and laborers of men. It does not save without some corresponding activity on our part. We must submit to become co-workers with God. Human agency, under Divine direction, is part of the economy of salvation. A man may go idly to perdition; but he cannot go to heaven without work. God lays out the vineyard, and he endows and calls men to serve in it; but they must go into it and employ their powers there as the Lord may direct. They have a confession to make, which indicates the boundaries of the vineyard. They have weeds to remove; and vines to trim, and water, and trail; and are charged with the care of developing fruit. Of themselves they can do nothing; but called of God, and joined with him

in his gracious plans, there is much dependent upon their exertions. And just so soon as they on their own account cease from work, and lay by from the toils of obedience and labor for the great Master, they cease from being what grace calls them to be, negative their engagement, and cut themselves off from the rewards of the faithful.

And such is the nature and variety of the work and offices to which God calls men, that there is a sphere and place for every one, whatever may be the extent or limitation of his capacity, or the peculiarity of his circumstances or nature. Grace avails itself of the most diverse and contrary elements, and moulds them all into its service. It is an anthem in which the highest and deepest, the softest and loudest, the most conspicuous and the most obscure tones are blended in the same wonderful harmony. The Apostles themselves were very unlike, and very differently constituted and endowed. There was Peter, with his sanguine, fiery quickness, prompt, rough, and ready; and there was James, cold, phlegmatic, and practical. There was John, melancholic, contemplative, loving, and maidenlike; and Thomas, the hesitating, skeptical, and quiet. There was Nathaniel, the lover of nature, solitude, and prayer; and others with other qualities;—all united in the same holy brotherhood of labor for Jesus. Even their ways of viewing the Gospel differed according to the individuality of each. James preached the faith of action and works; Peter, the faith of confession; Paul, the faith of justification; and John,

the faith of love and tenderness. With James, law is pre-eminent; with Paul, the righteousness of faith; with John, affection. In like manner, the Church had a place for Zaccheus with his riches, and for the widow with her mite; for Apollos with his eloquence, and Onesimus in his slavery; for Timothy, who had known the Scriptures from a child; and for the most neglected outcast who was but willing to learn of Jesus. And as it was from the first, so it is now; there is a place and work for every one and any one who is willing to enter the vineyard, and to do for Christ and heaven. And that place God desires to have filled, and that work done.

4. Nor is it a bootless service to which grace calls men. The householder has wages for every laborer in his vineyard. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. 4:8. It has its *denarius*—its day's wages—for this world, which no laborer in the vineyard shall miss; whilst it introduces into the field and company of those from whom there is to be a higher election to God's eternal favor and kingdom. In that higher final election to everlasting life and rewards, not all the called are chosen; and there are some last that shall be first, and some first that shall be last. But in the calling of any one to labor in the vineyard, there is included the offer of an opportunity for the highest eternal honors. Every laborer, indeed, is an acknowl

edged candidate for the highest dignities of the kingdom of God; and that kingdom, in its sublimest and most enduring blessedness, is proposed to every called one, at whatever hour the call may have reached him. That all who enter and work in the vineyard are not finally elected, and that some of the first and last are made to exchange places, is owing to no defect in the offer or opportunity afforded, but purely to the temper and spirit of the individuals themselves. Eternal salvation and rewards are put within the reach of every called one. Not a man, woman or child that has ever received baptism, or has learned the commandments, creed, and Lord's Prayer, or has heard a minister preach or a church-bell ring, can ever plead that no offer of heavenly blessedness was made to him or her. For it is the very office of the Gospel, and of all preaching and teaching of the Church, to propose to every one to whom it comes, all the fulness of rewards and honors described in the Saviour's promises. And if any finally fail in obtaining them, it will be entirely their own fault.

But, whether people are among the finally elect or not, if they enter the vineyard, and labor there, they will have their profit from it. The common morality of the Gospel, and the mere formality of observing its rites and services, even where the higher spirit of evangelical devotion is not imbibed, has its just rewards and advantages. Good Christian manners are a great improvement on the common world, though they be not accom-

panied with a thoroughly converted heart. They profit the man and the community which adopt them, even though salvation be not reached. The murmuring ones with an evil eye receive their "penny." Though not of the finally elect, the Householder says to each of them, "Take that thine is, and go thy way." His final favor they do not get; for, as observed by Gregory the great, "No murmurer can receive the kingdom of heaven, and no one who receives it can murmur." Yet, they get their penny, which, as Luther and Melancthon tell us, we must understand of temporal advantage only. It is that part of the gain of godliness for this present world, of which no laborer fails, but which, alas! is all that some men's religion brings them. Having done their work, they have their wages, though, as Luther says, they "trot away with it and are damned." But such is the nature of grace, that whosoever gives place to it, even out of a mercenary and sordid spirit, is raised and profited by it, and is compensated for what he does, though he never should attain to eternal life. With whatever "heat and burden" he is oppressed in what he does in the vineyard, he gets his equivalent remuneration, and has withal a better portion than if he had never thus hired himself; whilst he has been furnished, over and above his wages, with the same blessed opportunities for the sublime honors of eternity with the most fortunate.

So much for the movements of grace towards men. Look next at

II. The conduct of men towards it.

Three classes of persons are brought to view in the parable,—idlers, mercenary and unworthy laborers, and humble, trustful servants. All were idlers at the commencement. This empty and unoccupied state, with reference to God and duty, is the condition in which grace finds every one. It is a state of helplessness, until approached by some stronger and wealthier power from some quarter outside of man himself. It is a needy state, in which people require supplies, and have no means of procuring them. It is a dangerous state, in which there is exposure to be led away into the service of any unworthy master who may present himself, and in which strong temptations may come to induce entrance upon services which can only deceive, disappoint, and ruin. It is an unnatural and improper state. Man was made for activity. He has endowments for work and usefulness, which are intended to be employed, and which ought to be employed. For a man to be standing all the day idle, is a just subject of reproachful inquiry. And if persevered in, it is a ruinous state. Want and starvation are its inevitable wages. And from a situation so alarming and disastrous, it is the intention of Divine grace to rescue and relieve. Hence the constitution of the vineyard, and the call of men to go and labor in it, where they will find a just master, certain wages, and an open way to everlasting promotion

But some prefer idleness, and continue in it, notwithstanding the efforts to bring them into the vineyard of the Lord. Though grapes of spiritual joy are to be gathered, and clusters of blessings, purple and fragrant, call to be plucked, and precious rewards are sure for every act and hour, they stand about from morn to noon, and to the ninth and eleventh hours, without lifting a finger for Christ, or moving a foot in his service. The Householder comes to them in his word and providences, and shouts the trumpet-call, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" but they answer not except in mockery, and hug their ruinous idleness. Nor is it unlikely that I am addressing some of them to-day. The vineyard gates have been standing open to them for years; they have seen friends and acquaintances enter; they have often heard the songs of the vintagers, and the Master's invitation, "Go ye also into the vineyard;" and many a time they have been almost persuaded; but here they loiter still. O ye Christless ones! hear the summons of your Lord, and go. Never a more blessed opportunity can you have. Priceless joys are beckoning to you; a glorious harvest is ready for you; your time is narrowing to its close; nor was your noble nature meant to be wasted in this nothingness and misery.

> To breathe, to eat, to sleep,
> To smile, to sigh, to grieve,
> To hang an idler round God's earth,
> This, this, is not *to live!*

Up, then, improve your day;
Your time will soon be o'er;
Up from your dreams, embrace your chance,
Judgment is at the door!

Many, however, have entered the vineyard. But even they are not all satisfactory laborers. There are hirelings even in the sacred field—bargainers for a price—trustless stipulators beforehand for so much money, for so much labor. They have entered, but not from regard for the Householder, or for the good they could do, or out of shame for their idleness, or from any motive save to get wages for their work. Narrow, covetous, self-important, calculating souls, they wish to use both vineyard and its Master only for their own selfish ends. Such there have been in every age—people who use religion as a servant of their selfishness, instead of sacrificing everything to the service of religion. Cain was one of this sort, and Balaam, and Judas, and Simon Magus, and many of whom Paul wrote, who supposed that gain was godliness. And whosoever enters the Church, and sets himself to observe Christian duties, just to gain friends, or to enjoy a good name, or to appear respectable, or with no higher idea than to compensate for some crying sins, or to keep from suffering the pains of hell, is of the company of these hirelings, who count the wages and the hours, but have no right affections in their hearts for the Householder, the vineyard or the work.

There is a sort of Christianity very ready to

serve itself of Christ, to make him the scapegoat to bear its sins, the slave to work for its exaltation, and the unthanked servant to go before and open a way of escape from deserved condemnation; but which follows Christ only for the loaves and fishes. If it had no sins to account for, no disgrace to get rid of, no hell to fear, it would find no use for Christ, nor ever think of serving him. It counts the hours it works, and notes the items to augment its claims, and is full of envious dissatisfaction towards others who may get as much without working so long or bearing such burdens. Many there be who put on pious habits, and attend to pious observances, not because they take pleasure in being Christians, but only out of an irksome necessity, a slavish fear, or some selfish desire. As the yet unfledged and untutored apostles followed the Saviour disputing about premierships, looking to places of honor and power in this world, scheming for titles and emoluments which they expected the Messianic empire to bring, and dreaming often of the divided goods of the wealthy Pharisees and the tribute-money of the Gentiles; so there are some still who have their places in the Church, just for the worldly, social or intellectual satisfaction which it gives them, with no real appreciation of Jesus, his doctrines, or his claims. Even the church-going of some Christians is conditioned by the question, who is to preach, what gifts the minister can bring to his work, how elegantly the choir can sing; all of which is nothing more nor less than

what wages they are to get per hour in the sanctuary. And Pharisaic spirits are not wanting, who in their secret souls believe, that if anybody is saved they will be, because they have been so long in the vineyard, and have labored so hard, and done so much.

But, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Having wrought as hirelings, they will be paid as hirelings, and there the matter ends. They get their penny, but they are dismissed from the service; for "many be called, but few chosen."

Some, however, are good and faithful servants. Many of them have been called late. Much of their precious time has been spent in inexcusable idleness. And they have much to make them ashamed in entering the vineyard at so late an hour. But they realize that shame. They are heartily sorry for such long neglect of such gracious opportunities. They feel condemned for their protracted idleness and folly, and are willing to work for nothing rather than continue as they were. They ask not about the wages they are to receive, esteeming the privilege of escaping from their shameful idleness reward enough for all that they can do in the brief period which yet remains for work. They see nothing but goodness in the Householder in being willing to take them in so late in the day. They feel that it is a pleasure to serve such a Master, and that they may well trust the entire result to his kindness. If they get but little, they still are satis-

fied that it is more than they deserve. They are not hirelings. They make no bargain for so much pay for so much service. They have no claims to prefer, no demands to make, no accounts of indebtedness against God. They view themselves as simply unworthy and guilty idlers, glad to go and work for the sake of work, and happy in the chance to employ themselves as becomes men to be employed, whether they are to have wages for it or not. They are humble, confiding, and cheerfully obedient. They are ashamed of their sloth; they have faith in Him who has called them to his service; and they go with a good heart to the duties to which they are bidden. Themselves they abase, and their Lord they exalt. And this is what the Master approves and so graciously honors.

After all, my brethren, there is nothing like contrition, humility, faith, and cheerful uncalculating obedience. This alone is of any real account before God. It is not the number or length of the prayers we say, or the number of sermons we hear and remember, or the number of souls we win, or the donations we make to the poor or to the operations of benevolence, or any heat and burden of the day we endure, or services we render, that is to recommend us to the Divine favor. It is rather the honest regret and shame we feel on account of our sins, our deep sense of the Divine goodness, our appreciation of Christ, and the privilege of becoming his disciples, our humble and unhesitating surrender of ourselves

to him as our proper Lord and Master, and our grateful acquiescence in whatever service or reward he may see proper to assign us, that makes our calling and election sure. "Thus saith the Lord; to this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Isaiah 66: 2.

From this subject, then, let us learn to admire the glorious beneficence of our God. He has not only made us, and endowed us for exalted and profitable service, but when we had forfeited everything, and thrown ourselves out by our sins from all right to his favor or all just hope of restoration, he pitied us, and instituted measures to redeem us. Seeing us disinherited, idle and helpless, he constituted a vineyard to give us work, and an opportunity of return to the inheritance which our wickedness has forfeited. He has sent out to us repeatedly, as we have loitered about the markets of the world, and besought us to come work in his vineyard, proposing exceeding great and precious promises to the willing and obedient. Hour after hour he has caused us to hear his voice and gracious entreaties. And even to this very moment, and now within these very walls, he is still saying to you and to me, "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." O the goodness and unwearied love and beneficence of our God!

From this subject let us also learn, that there is something for us to do. Standing here all the day idle there is no salvation for us. We must our

selves move to the movements of grace. Works cannot save us. Grace only can do that. But grace qualifies as it calls for activity. We cannot be our own saviours; Christ alone can accomplish so great a work. But Christ has a yoke which we need to take upon us, and learn of him; and we only partake of his salvation as he lives and walks in us.

'Tis not the mighty ones of earth,
That proudly boast of noble birth,
Whose chief delight is wine and mirth,
Ambitious for the applause of earth—
That wear the crown of glory.

Nor yet the thoughtless and the gay,
Who love to walk in folly's way,
Regardless what they do or say,—
Baubles that sparkle for a day,—
That wear the crown of glory.

Nor saints by name who lightly tread
Beneath their feet what God hath said;
At fashion's shrine who meekly nod,
Lovers of pleasure more than God—
That wear the crown of glory.

But those who choose the narrow road,
That once their Saviour's footsteps trod
Nor faint beneath the chastening rod,
Their rule of life, the word of God—
These wear the crown of glory.

And, finally, from this subject let us learn to move forward a little in our contemplations to the evening of this day of life and grace, to see how it will be with us when the noise and bustle of this world is over, and the Lord of the vineyard sends

his steward to settle up our earthly accounts. As sure as sunset follows morning, that solemn evening time will come. How, then, are we preparing to meet it? What sort of records are we making to be then confronted, and by which to decide our eternity? O let no one deceive himself with hopes of favor then, who is not willing to work in God's vineyard now. And if any of you have thus far been standing idle, or serving only in a hireling spirit, loving neither the Master nor the work, let this be the day to decide you to your duty. O man, O woman, the message of thy God to thee is: "Go thou also into the vineyard."

Hide not thy talent in the earth:—
  However small it be,
Its faithful use, its utmost worth,
  God will require of thee.

The humblest service rendered here
  He will as truly own,
As Paul's in his exalted sphere,
  Or Gabriel's, near the throne.

The cup of water kindly given,
  The widow's cheerful mites,
Are worthier, in the eyes of heaven,
  Than pride's most costly rites.

His own, which he hath lent on trust,
  He asks of thee again;
Little or much, the claim is just,
  And thine excuses vain.

Go, then, and strive to do thy part:
  Though humble it may be,
The ready hand, the willing heart,
  Are all heaven asks of thee.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Luke 8 : 4–15. And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable :

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold.

And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

ONE of the strangest things in human history, is the fate of the Gospel with the most of those to whom it is preached. Apart from the results of actual experiment, there is every reason to suppose that it

would bring to salvation all whom it addresses. It is the word of God, and "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." Heb. 4:12. It goes to its end with a potency and independence unparalleled in the universe. It called creation into being. It strikes into the soul, and commands the conscience, in spite of all attempts to disregard it. We would therefore expect it to work the results for which it is given, in every heart to which it comes. It is also freighted with such precious good, and is a life principle meant and fitted for such a glorious harvest of eternal blessedness, and is urged by such solemn and mighty sanctions of authority and promise, that it is almost impossible to conceive how it could fail of a hearty welcome and a saving fruitfulness. There is also such a complete affinity between it and the soul,—the one so entirely adapted to receive, entertain, and unfold, and the other to implant with a new life of good and loveliness,—that it would be a most natural thing, when the two are brought into right connection, for the happiest results to follow. There is also such a constancy and variety of instrumentality and effort, to prepare men to appreciate and receive it, and to bring the truth into advantageous relation to their minds and hearts, that it cannot be comprehended in advance how there should be any one in Christendom not thoroughly transformed by its sanctifying power.

But, when we come to survey the facts, we find things very different from these reasonable expectations. Though "the word of God is quick and powerful," and "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb," and fondly received and fruitfully entertained by some; to the majority of its hearers, it is as spilled water which cannot be gathered, and sinks away as destitute of any permanently good effect as if it had never been. Even among those who frequent our sanctuaries, and make up the companies of our most constant hearers, there are very many of the class concerning whom the Lord spoke to Ezekiel: "They speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Ezek. 33 : 30–32. They are such as James likens "unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." James 1 : 23, 24. In other words, they hear the Gospel, and often protess great pleasure in it, but are not savingly affected by it The whole thing is an utter failure to them as re

gards the eternal benefits which it was meant to accomplish for their souls.

Now, why is this? The reason certainly is not to be found in any want of efficacy in the word. Let it be once fairly ascertained that a thing is the unmistakable utterance and will of Almighty God, and it is not in the nature of the human mind to be unaffected by it, or to gainsay it without inward compunctions. When Jehovah says, "Thou shalt not kill," it is not in the power of man to disobey that word, and not feel the judgment already set in in his own heart and conscience. Nor is the Gospel less potent than the law.

Looking at the infirmities and sins of the instruments to whom God has committed the work of preaching the Gospel, it might be supposed that its want of power may, perhaps, lie with the ministers. People, at any rate, are very free in these days to lay the sins of government, the mischiefs in the Church, and the lack of efficiency in Christian effort, to the charge of those who happen to be invested with sacred functions. Nor would I utter one word of apology for selfish, meddlesome, ambitious, unprincipled, unfaithful, ungodly ministers, of whom there are more than enough. But the same result has attended the ministrations of the holiest and most able of God's servants. Isaiah was a man of God, commissioned direct from the throne, whose lips were touched and fired from the heavenly altar, and whose words have come echoing through the ages as

among the most miraculous utterances of time; and yet he was compelled to go to his heavenly Master lamenting, that no one believed his report, and that to no one was the arm of the Lord savingly revealed. Is. 53 : 1. Even the adorable Saviour himself saw his hearers forsake him in crowds, and made sore complaint against the men to whom he spake: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." John 5 : 40. Paul, and Luther, and the best of ministers in all ages, have had the same experience; so that it will not answer merely to refer Christendom's want of faith to the infirmities and sins of its ministers. Even the weak things are quite strong enough to confound the mighty, provided only that a right spirit be found on the part of those to whom the truth is addressed.

Nor is it because of some foregone decree of God, which has forever shut out some from all chance of being anything but reprobates. God has his decrees. The universe is built on them, as well as the economy of grace; but he has sent a chillness into no one's blood, or a hardness into no one's nature, or reserved an unalterable discrimination of saving ability against no one's call, which makes it impossible for some to hear any other way than to everlasting condemnation. The grace to comply with the Gospel is coextensive with the invitation to exercise it. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3 : 16. And from

that "*whosoever*" no man, woman, or child in being is excluded, or can be excluded, except by the self-exclusion of unbelief.

The question then recurs with redoubled interest, Why are so many hearers of the Gospel not savingly benefited by it? The words of the Saviour, which the lesson for this morning brings before us, contain the answer. Three out of four, to whom God's gracious word is given, are here represented as coming short of the proper blessedness which it is intended to produce; and the reasons of it are set forth as partly *the guilt of man*, and partly *the just judgment of God.*

Four sorts or conditions of ground does the seed of God's heavenly sowing find among men. Some are described as way-side hearers, who receive the seed of the word as the hard footpath, where it is not at all embraced, and where, from its exposed condition, it is soon caught away by watching birds, and never takes root at all. Some are rocky-ground hearers, who receive the seed as the thin loose earth, where the rock is near, and the moisture fails as the summer approaches, and the springing plant wilts and scorches to death. Others are thorny-ground hearers, who receive the seed like those fertile spots infested with the seeds and roots of weeds and briers, which presently overpower its gentle growth, and smother it with their rank luxuriance. Whilst a fourth class receive the word as the clean, moist, and mellow soil takes the good seed of the husbandman, nourishes it in its genial bosom, and is

finally crowned with the ripe and beautiful harvest. The seed is sown upon all these alike, but the results are very different. In the one, the seed never germinates; but as it falls, so it departs. In the next, it sprouts, takes root, and springs up; but then sickens and perishes for want of depth of soil. In the third, it grows thriftily, and has all the natural healthfulness and prospect of blessed maturity; but is choked and overcome by the still greater vigor of other growths. But in the fourth, it progresses unhindered, from a happy seeding to a happy harvest.

It might seem, from a superficial glance at this picture, as if the quality of the soil in which the Gospel seed is sown were a foregone thing, quite exculpating from any blame in case of non-productiveness. For, if a man is by pre-necessity a way-side hearer, of course no fault can be found with him for not receiving the seed as the good-ground hearer. Harvests are not to be expected from highways and beaten footpaths. And so, too, in regard to the second and third classes. But it is a great mistake to regard this parable as contemplating these several kinds of soil as the involuntary and fixed condition of those to whom the Gospel is addressed. God never goes forth to sow, except where he may rightfully hope for a harvest. To predicate anything different from this of Almighty God, would be to make him more foolish than the commonest wisdom of the world. He accordingly approaches every hearer of his word as good ground. It is assumed all

through, in all the calls and offers of the Gospel, that there is ample capacity and capability on the part of every one to receive the offered salvation unto full fruition of blessedness. And if the word of life finds in any one a different soil from that which brings the harvest, the fault must lie with that individual himself. The truth is, that these several kinds of soils,—the hardness of the first, the thinness of the second, the thorniness of the third, and the goodness of the fourth,—are simply material representations of different tempers of men, and their methods of dealing towards the truth. One is a way-side hearer, not because nature or Providence made him so; but because he makes himself so, by hardening his heart, resisting the truth, shutting his eyes to the light, or letting the thing drop from his attention without seeking to put in practice what he has learned. The good seed is sown upon his heart, where it ought to find a good soil; but, it produces no effect, works no change, starts no new life, not because his nature is such that nothing of this is possible, but because he is not willing to entertain the truth, or to give himself any concern about it. He is inattentive, unbelieving, rebellious against the claims of God, and studies to put the matter from him, to banish it from his thoughts, and to have nothing to do with subjects so unpleasant to him. He thus himself throws up against the word the hardness, antagonism, and unreceptivity which precludes fruitfulness. The reason that he is a way-side hearer is, that

he makes himself so by the treatment which he renders to the Gospel. The reason that the seed takes no root in him, but is left to be devoured by the enemy is, that he wilfully shuts his heart against it, and turns away from it, and gives it no place in his serious regard. And if I am addressing any one who has been long listening to the Gospel without being brought under its saving power, I make my appeal to that man's own conscience, whether it is not a fact, that he has many a time felt the call of God to change his ways and become a Christian, and as often resisted it, and endeavored to forget it, or resorted to measures and resolves of his own, by which to get rid of it for the time at least? I ask not that you should tell me how this thing has been with you; I know how it has been. I know that many a moment of deep spiritual seriousness has passed over your soul, when the voice of conscience lifted its cry of warning admonition from within, when the necessity of giving yourself to God and a better life pressed heavily upon your heart, and when you could hardly check down the motion within you to throw yourself upon your knees in supplication for Divine mercy to relieve you of your burden. And if you are still a prayerless and impenitent man or woman, I do not ask you to tell me the guilty processes through which you have passed. I know them well. I know that there stands written upon your memory many an instance of positive refusal to obey the impulses of the Holy Ghost, and many a struggle against the

clear and felt calls of God, and many a resistance to the promptings of conscience, and many a positive putting of the subject from you for a more convenient season, and many an attempt to reason yourself into the belief that your danger was not as great as your impressions intimated. At the least, you cannot deny having put off doing what you were at times most powerfully impelled to do, and having so checked your convictions as to quiet them, without obeying them. You thus *made yourself* a way-side hearer—a receiver of the seed upon a soil hardened and beaten so as to resist admission,—and are hence yourself answerable for its non-fruitfulness in your case.

The same is true of the shallow-ground hearer. He is a mere superficial Christian. He has not the callousness of the first mentioned; but his fault is, that he is too soft. He receives the Gospel, gives it entertainment, yields to it, and zealously sets himself, as he thinks, to profit by it. But his religion is one of sentiment and passion only, not of thorough comprehension and settled principle. Excitement, novelty, undefined impulse, a loose persuasion carries him, and a pleasant enthusiasm impels him for the time. But when occasion comes for the trial of what his piety is made of, and his rapturous feeling has expended itself, and there is nothing left for him to lean on but the inward vigor of naked conviction and solid principle, the spring rivulet dries up, and the whole thing comes to nought. The result is natural enough from such a commence-

ment; but in vain will the fickle enthusiast plead innocence in the matter. It was his business to have a better understanding of what he was about, to make a better survey of his ground, to count the cost before adventuring upon such an expedition. The seed finds in him no depth, for the reason that he does not give it depth. He treats the Gospel as a less serious thing than it is. He takes eager hold of it without the earnestness of consideration, and the careful scrutiny of his own heart and the nature of the case, which alone can secure permanence and fruit. He is more enthusiastic than considerate, more willing than wise, more emotional than calculating; and he is a mere mushroom of a saint, because he would not give himself the trouble and attention to secure a planting for a hardier growth. And no matter who it is that has backslidden from a once joyous zeal in Christianity, tired and weary of the work formerly so delighted in, the fault has been with himself.

And so also the thorny-ground disciple. It is not that God and nature have given him no chance against the weeds and briers—the "cares, riches, and pleasures of this life;"—but from his own dalliance with mammon, lust, and giddiness, that the good which began to grow in his soul is choked and rendered unfruitful. Too much business; too great anxiety to be rich, or to hold place in the race with worldly people; too much absorption with the competitions for gain and success; too much engrossment with the manage-

ment of investments and fortune; too much preoccupation with the schemes of avarice, ambition, and earthly emolument; or too much yielding to the solicitations of worldly gayety and pleasure;—things quite within his own choice and control;—these he suffers, until they unconsciously smother his goodness, and bring all his fair-promising devotion to nothingness. Oh, that chance to make a fortune! that wish to appear as well as other people! that pleasure of having an influence with the world! that satisfaction of being courted and flattered by people of consequence! that enjoyment, where the strict rules of sobriety are set aside for the time! what precious hopes they have quenched! what beautiful harvests they have destroyed! Christian people enter the lists with worldliness, and lend themselves to questionable speculations and engrossing adventures, and apologize for their balls, and parties, and masquerades, and dances, and theatres, and operas, and worldly compliances of one sort and another, until the very life of their religion is choked out of them. But in vain will such people plead that none of the responsibility for the sad result is theirs. They are themselves the guilty causes of it all.

And so in every case, the failure of the Gospel to bring men to final salvation, is primarily their own fault. If any of you are yet "in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity;" if all these repeated appeals, sermons, and opportunities, still leave you uninterested or unsaved, whatever weaknesses and sins may be chargeable to the preacher,

your impenitence and unfaithfulness are your own. You cannot plead that God has not called you, and warned you, and scattered the seed of his truth into your heart. You cannot go before Him this day, and charge that those things which have hindered you from being thorough Christians are of *His* making. Nor is there anything in heaven or earth to prevent you from going from this house this day with your heart savingly given to God, but your own self-nursed unbelief and unwillingness to surrender yourself to the truth.

It is, therefore, fairly made out from the Scriptures, and confirmed by common experience, that the primary and principal reason of the inefficacy of the preached Gospel is the guilty resistance, negligence, and worldliness of the people themselves.

But there is another element in the case. Much as we must needs refer to man's own guilt, there is a law in God's arrangements which brings present judgment to bear upon the wilfully disobedient. Resisting the Spirit of truth, the heart is judicially hardened, and gradually incapacitated for belief, stopping the inward ears, so that the perseverer in rebellion is finally deprived of ability to hear. The cause of this is always man's own wilful disobedience. God calls, but men refuse; He stretches out his hand, but they disregard; He pleads and cautions, but they set at nought his counsel, and will none of his reproof; and by the repetition of such behavior until it be-

comes habitual, there comes a retributive weakening and paralysis of the power to do otherwise, which sometimes fixes the seal of damnation upon offenders even on this side of the grave. The unvarying law of grace is, that "whosoever hath," if he will give heed and seek to improve by it, "to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not," that is, shows no willingness to profit by his opportunities, "from him shall be taken away even that which he thinketh he hath." Luke 8:18.

Hence the veiled manner in which the Gospel came to the Jewish multitudes. They had had a glorious training under the ministry of prophets, and various distinguished servants and administrations of God. They had been most impressively called and admonished by John the Baptist. But with all the gracious culture of two thousand years, which they inherited as their birth-right, and with all the zealous fidelity of John and the wonderful miracles of Jesus, they were unbelieving, clung to their carnal notions, and refused to come under the obedience of faith. In them was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Matt. 13:14, 15. The few disciples were the only exceptions. To these, therefore, "it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others, in parables; that see-

ing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." In other words, their rebelliousness and misimprovement of their mercies, brought upon them a judicial veil which obscured the truth to their unwilling hearts, and enfeebled their chances of ever being saved at all.

The idea is not that God from eternity so interferes as to ordain some to inevitable perdition without opportunity for a better destiny; but that, having repeatedly offered them his grace, which they have as often wilfully and deliberately rejected and misimproved, his grieved Spirit begins to withdraw itself in the way of punishment for their iniquitous behavior, and their opportunities become less and less with every act of disobedience, until at last all hope is clean gone forever. There is such a thing as putting off until it is *too late*. There is a retribution for unbelief, and for resistance to God's calls and claims, even in this life. "He that believeth not *is judged already*, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:18. And that judgment begins in the exact line of the offence. Shutting one's eyes to duty, obscures the capacity to see duty. Closing one's ears to the calls of God, diminishes the power to distinguish God's voice. Turning away the heart from good, dulls its appreciation, and hinders its power to lay hold of good. And stifling conviction, or trifling with sacred opportunities, disables the whole moral nature, and presently puts forever beyond the susceptibility of salvation.

The proclamation of the Gospel to men, though it be by human and earthly instrumentality, is a Divine thing. It is a gracious movement from the Creator and King of the universe. It is a word from the almighty throne. It is an utterance of the same power which called forth and upholds the worlds. And it inheres in its very nature and source to be effective, one way or another. Like the stroke of the hammer on the iron, it must either indent it to its own likeness, or harden and break it. As the sun nourishes and beautifies the tree that is alive to its quickening influence, but blasts and decomposes it when it gives no living response to its genial beams; so it is a heavenly savor of life unto life to them that throw their hearts open to it, but an instrument of judgment and destruction to them that misimprove it. It must either save men, or become to them a stumbling-block or a rock of offence, inflicting disabling judgment in this world, and an augmented perdition in that which is to come. Nor is there a more effective way of putting one's self under judicial privations, or of fastening upon one's soul, even here, the unsalvable character of lost spirits, than just this stiffening of the heart against the calls of grace, and this stubborn, disdainful, or procrastinating withholding of the obedience which is rightfully due to God under the evangelic culture which he is bestowing upon us.

Thus, then, to man's own wilful unbelief, and as the result of it, there is added the disabling

judgment of God, contributing to the sad unfruitfulness of the Gospel to so many who hear it. Salvation is brought to men, and is proposed to them in all its Divine truthfulness and efficacy; but people hesitate, and put it from them, or only superficially embrace it, or take it only in company with what is inimical to it; and the result is, that it gradually retires, and many whom it would have saved are finally left, so that no capacity to repent any longer remains to them. We may then preach to them with all the power of inspiration, but it has no more effect than words spoken to the deaf adder. People may make light of it, but that will not alter the facts, nor exempt from the irresistible potency of Jehovah's laws. And if there is any truth in the words of Jesus, our best hopes are linked with these sanctuary lessons, and our destiny must turn on the temper with which we receive them. Yes, my brethren, though it be but a sinful being like yourselves to whom you listen, you are hearing for eternity. As in the case of one on trial for his life, for whose acquittal or condemnation every word of the witnesses is telling, so these repeated Gospel messages are settling your everlasting fate. Even these poor words of mine, and these very syllables as they drop upon your ears, as far as they set forth the truth of God, are making for the bliss or woe of your immortality, and must vibrate forever in your blessedness in heaven or your anguish in perdition, just as you receive them with good and honest hearts, or slightingly

or malignantly put them aside. And one of the most painful reflections for a faithful minister is, that in his best meant ministrations to his people, he is necessarily ministering aggravated judgment upon many a soul which he fain would save, and fixing the seal of eternal reprobation upon some whom it is his most earnest wish to bring to Christ and heaven.

How important, therefore, is that injunction of the Saviour, for men to take heed how they hear! Those oft despised and neglected messages are, after all, the seed-grains of salvation. Turning a deaf ear to them, is shutting the doors of mercy on our own souls. Throwing them off from serious attention, is throwing off God's appointed vehicle of eternal life. The Lord over all is indeed rich in mercy to all who call upon him; and it is mercifully ordained, that whosoever shall truly call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But the inspired apostle has put the case in its real character, where he adds: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10:12–17.

Let me beseech you, then, my friends and brethren, whatsoever you do, not to trifle with a preached Gospel. It is the most precious privilege God gives to man on earth. But to treat it with indifference, or to sport malignantly with it,

or to receive it any otherwise than as good-ground hearers, is simply to take out an insurance for perdition. Well, therefore, might the Saviour close this parable, with which I also close this discourse, crying, "HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR." Yea, LET HIM HEAR! for therein is his salvation.

Almighty God, Thy word is cast
  Like seed into the ground;
O may it grow in humble hearts,
  And righteous fruits abound.

Let not the foe of Christ and man
  This holy seed remove,
But give it root in willing souls
  To bring forth fruits of love.

Let not Thy word, so kindly sent
  To raise us to Thy throne,
Return to Thee, and sadly tell
  That we reject Thy Son.

Great God, come down, and on Thy word
  Thy mighty power bestow,
That all who hear the joyful sound
  Thy saving grace may know.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Luke 18 : 31–43. Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

THE centre of Christianity is Christ; and the centre of Christ's history is his passion, or suffering for the sins of the world. It is, therefore, with special solemnity, that Christians have approached the commemoration of it. From the earliest periods of the Church—according to the first Christian Emperor, "from the first day of our Lord's passion"—there has been a portion of the year set

apart for meditation upon the Saviour's sufferings and death, which was usually passed, as Eusebius says, "in fasting and watching, and in the study of the Divine word." The universality and reverence with which Christendom observed this custom, are particularly referred to by Basil, in the fourth century, where he says, "There is no island nor continent of the earth, no city, nor nation, nor extreme corner of the world, where the edict of this observance was not heard. Yea, whatsoever armies, merchants, travellers, or mariners are abroad, this fast comes unto them all, and with joy they all receive it. This composes every house, every city, and every people, into sobriety, and quiet, and concord. This stills the late clamors, contentions, and noises of the town. Let no one, therefore, exempt himself from the number of fasters, in which every degree, nation, and age, almost, of men, and of all dignities whatsoever, are engaged."

This solemnity was fixed to the spring season; hence the name of *Lent*, by which it is commonly known. "Lent" is a Saxon word for spring, or that portion of the year in which the days begin perceptibly to *lengthen*. It literally refers to the incoming of the longer days. These lengthening days were chosen for the special commemoration of the Saviour's passion, for the reason that his death occurred in the spring. Thus this commemoration itself came to be religiously called *Lent;* that is, the solemn penitential observance, by Christians, of the lengthening days.

At first it may not have extended over the paschal week; but it was, at a very early period, arranged to cover forty days preceding the Festival of the Resurrection. Several considerations served to fix this quadragesimal number. Forty years were the children of Israel under discipline in their trying pilgrimage. Forty days did Moses fast in the mount. Forty days was Elijah in the wilderness. Forty days did the Ninevites fast, to avert the judgments prophesied of by Jonah. And forty days it was that the Saviour himself was pleased to fast when about to enter upon the work of his public ministry. Forty days, therefore, were numbered for this solemnity of the lengthening days.

It is not a Divine appointment, and hence not of absolute obligation upon Christians. Its appropriateness, however, no one can reasonably question; and its usefulness, when observed in the true spirit of Christianity, is indisputable. It is also true that many Christians, as early as the days of Tertullian, did consider some such season of special penitence for Christian observance embraced in those words of the Saviour, when he said, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? . . . but the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and *then shall they fast in those days.*" Mark 2:19, 20. And now, since the Bridegroom has been taken away, if any body or company of his followers choose, in sorrow and penitential exercises, to observe the

anniversary of his passion for forty lengthening days, what man is he that can lay aught to their charge, or say that no spiritual blessings for themselves and friends may thus be secured? And more especially in these times of abounding wickedness, superficial piety, and threatening judgment, does it become Christian people to heed these ancient customs and admonitions of the Church in its purest periods, and to set themselves earnestly to chasten their worldliness, and to seek with all diligence for a deeper communion with Jesus, and what he has done and suffered for them.

Our Church, indeed, makes no special requirement of her members with reference to this season; but she recognizes its propriety, and has provided in her lessons and Liturgies for such an observance of it as accords with the importance of the subject, and as may not contravene or obscure the great root-doctrine of justification by faith. She provides for one or two special services each week during these lengthening days, to be observed with the spirit of fresh consecration to the blessed Saviour, and more earnest striving against sin. And she appoints such Scriptures for the Lent Sunday lessons as may the better enable us to understand the Saviour's work of expiation, and devoutly and practically to lean our souls upon it as our only hope of everlasting life. No special *régime* for the body is prescribed, except such restraints upon our ordinary indulgences, cares, and worldly pursuits, as naturally

and necessarily go along with a waking up of the soul to its sins and wants, and a renewed earnestness in the pursuit of salvation. She does not command to abstain from meats, as though that could help to atone for sin; but she does insist upon such a life-reformation, and soul-discipline, and mortification of the flesh, and looking to Christ as our self-sacrificing Mediator and Redeemer, as shall lead us to turn from all unrighteousness, loose the bands of wickedness, remove the yoke of our oppressions, deal bread to the hungry, clothe the naked, regard the needy, and show the same merciful mind which was exemplified by our blessed Lord. And so, in this last Sunday before Lent, she already directs her children's eyes toward Calvary and the cross.

The Gospel for this morning, shows us Christ in his last journey to Jerusalem. It was the most momentous journey ever performed on earth; not indeed in its extent, but in its real character and consequences. It was a journey on which hung the hopes of the world, and of all men, for time and for eternity. It excited but little attention among men, but angels were looking on it with solemn awe and unwonted emotion. It was a journey marked and wondered at in heaven, and at which, we may well imagine, the very principalities of the upper worlds moved with mysterious and impressive interest. It was the journey of a poor son of Abraham, with a few followers mostly as poor, from Galilee to the holy city, to attend to the paschal festival of the Jewish re-

ligion But in that poor Israelite we recognize the promised King of salvation, on his way to take possession of his eternal throne. In him we behold the Lamb of God, to whom all paschal lambs for two thousand years had pointed, going forward voluntarily to the sacrifice, which was forever to fulfil all sacrifices, and to make an end of them by once for all laying himself, in all his human excellence and divine glory, upon the altar. In him we contemplate the Son of God, God of God, and Light of Light, on his way to give himself to immolation, death, and the grave, to redeem a world lying in sin, and under the immeasurable condemnation of an infinite law. That journey was to result in the eclipse of the very Sun of Righteousness—the destruction of the brightest and purest life that ever was enacted upon earth—the spilling of the most precious blood that ever pulsated in human veins. It was a journey to rejection by the representatives and officials of his nation, to betrayal by his friends, to buffetings, and lashings and mockings of his enemies, to anguish and maltreatment such as no human being ever bore, and to the shame and horrors of crucifixion with the worst of criminals. Nor can we at all enter into the facts of the case without feeling the chills creeping through our blood, as that meek messenger and son of Heaven takes up the line of march for what awaited him at the holy city!

And yet, he knew it all when he started, and had the whole scene distinctly before him as he

went. People sometimes march very unconcernedly into the jaws of destruction; but it is because of their ignorance of what is about to befall them. Such was not the Saviour's case. He was quite acquainted, all the way through, with what sort of fate he was to meet. As early as Peter's confession of him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, "he began to show unto his disciples, how that he must suffer many things." Matt. 16 : 16–21; Luke 9 : 18–22. When he came down from the mount of his glorious transfiguration, where the apostles saw his majesty, and heard a voice from the excellent glory proclaiming his divine Sonship, he in like manner talked to them of the dreadful things which were shortly to come upon him. Matt. 17 : 1–23; Luke 9 : 28, 45. And here, at the very commencement of this marvellous journey, he "took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets, concerning the Son of man, shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on. And they shall scourge him, and put him to death."

The disciples, indeed, did not comprehend these foreshowings. "They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." They heard the words, and remembered them, and afterwards bore witness to them; but, as yet, their conceptions of the Messiah could not take in the idea

of his sufferings. Their eyes were on the glory of the kingdom; and they were in hopes that Jesus was about to assert his Kingship, and put forth his power, sure that that only was requisite to fill out the picture of the prophecies concerning him. The idea of his dying, or being discomfited by his enemies, they could not at all take in, or reconcile with what he himself had said of the coming glory. They knew of a conquering Messiah, but not of a suffering one. And when he talked to them of falling into the hands of the Gentiles, undergoing humiliation, and being put to death, they could not comprehend what he meant. His words were as riddles to them. Nor can any one rightly understand Christ, or Christianity, so long as the great doctrine of obedience unto death as a propitiation and sacrifice for human guilt is not first taken in as the primordial requirement to the Messianic kingdom and glory. The Saviour's soul had first to be made an offering for sin, before he could see his seed, prolong his days, and behold the pleasure of the Lord in the glorious administrations of his hands.

And it is just here where many of his professed disciples still fail. They look upon Christianity simply as a humanitarian power, to stimulate and guide human progress. They would have the kingdom realized without a cancelling of the bonds of guilt in the Saviour's blood, and a sacrificial payment of the penalty of the old law, in order to have free subjects for a new empire. They have no use for the great blood-doctrine of

satisfaction for sin by vicarious suffering, except as a mere pattern of heroism and incitement to philanthropic endeavor. But, to whatever heights they may rise in their estimates of the Christ in other respects, so long as they fail to view him as our atoning sacrifice, "delivered for our offences," bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and laying the foundations of his kingdom in the voluntary endurance of what was due to human guilt, they are yet in a like darkness to that of the immature disciples in the text, and need a deeper baptism of the Spirit to enable them to penetrate to the sublime depths of motive and goodness which controlled the movements of the Saviour, or to the real root and essence of true Christianity. What we need is an adequate sacrifice for sin—a righteousness to cover our iniquities—a satisfaction to outraged justice as a foundation on which God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. But, "without shedding of blood is no remission." Heb. 9 : 22. It therefore "behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name among all nations." Luke 24 : 46, 47. And until men learn thus to take in the Saviour's sufferings as the fundamental pre-requisite to his headship of a new kingdom of redemption, they never can comprehend him, his words, or his work.

And it was precisely on account of this non-comprehension of what was necessary, and to

guard against the dangers to which it exposed, that the Saviour was so particular and minute in his foreshowings of the griefs and indignities which he was to endure. He well knew that there could be no crown without the cross, and no eternal life without his own death He accordingly dwelt upon his sufferings in advance, as a most essential part of his Messianic work, illustrating at once his superhuman foresight, the voluntariness of his submission, the tenderness of his compassion, and the sublime magnanimity of his self-sacrifice for rebellious and undeserving men. And only when we consider his complete foreknowledge of all the sad particulars of his fate, does the real majesty and superlative character of his condescending goodness, courage, meekness, and endurance for us, appear in their true light. His whole life was a continuous martyrdom—one vast, life-long crucifixion, voluntarily acquiesced in to bring poor sinners to salvation. There is nothing so torturing as to live in the prospect of certain and overwhelming anguish. Knowing that it must come, it is suffered a hundred times by being delayed. Yet, in anticipation of all the horrors of his last experiences, the Saviour continually lived; and to this hell of affliction and torture he cheerfully gave himself, and of his own accord meekly waited his time, and then went forward to lay down his precious life for ours!

And yet, Son of God as he was, and on his way to a known immolation, such as the world had

never seen, he still had an open ear for the cries of distress, and a ready hand to minister to its relief. The blind beggar by the wayside asked and received his beneficent attention. To many the beggar's cry seemed an improper intrusion upon the Saviour. But it was a cry for mercy, and it was not in the heart of the great Exemplar of mercy to pass it unheeded. He stopped, and called for the suppliant. Darkened eyes and darkened hearts found light in that gracious pause. Confidence turned its sightless eyeballs toward the Sun of Righteousness, and the healing word went forth, "*Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee.*" And that word was effective. Sight was given; and the recipient fell in with the company, giving glory to God, whilst the whole procession thrilled with grateful joy over the wonder that was wrought.

How appropriate are these facts to the season upon which we this week enter! Like these disciples, even the best of us still have much to learn concerning Christ and the mystery of his sufferings. And like Bartimeus we are blind, and poor, and destitute. Though we have seeing eyes, and sufficiency of this world for our bodily wants: still, by nature and our sins, we are heart-blind, and heart-destitute; and there is no recovery but in the mercy of Jesus. We are members of a fallen race, and born children of wrath even as others. By our connection with Adam, we are utterly undone; and sin and wretchedness cling to us as a natural and inevitable inheritance. And

the special object of these Lenten solemnities is, to bring us to a proper consciousness of our darkness and misery, and into such penitential fellowship with our Saviour's sufferings as may make us the happy participants in their precious benefits. The Church intends that these lengthening days, in which nature is beginning to stir with a new life, and to move for the putting on of her summer beauties and autumn fruits, should be to us days of spiritual quickening—days of revival—days for the lamentation of our sins, the acknowledgment of our wretchedness, and the emendation of our ways—days of earnest seeking unto the Lord, that we may obtain mercy of him, and have perfect remission and forgiveness unto righteousness, and everlasting life. And the key-note of all this is struck in this morning's Gospel. Let us briefly note and apply a few points.

1. We here behold the Saviour and his disciples with their faces towards Jerusalem—towards the temple—towards the centre of the appointed worship and ordinances of Jehovah. Jesus said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." And it is just this to which the present season and its lessons call us. The great festival of the Passover approaches. The most solemn observance of the whole year draweth on. The highest ceremonial in the Christian calendar is now near at hand. The grand commemoration of the expiation of the world's guilt is presently to transpire. And if there is one time above another which demands

special seriousness on the part of men, it is the time of the approach of the anniversary of the great atoning sacrifice by which alone any mortal can be saved. The Lenten time, is that time. We enter upon it this very week. The Church, therefore, admonishes and calls us to-day to set our faces towards Jerusalem. Whatever has hitherto been occupying us, we are now to direct our thoughts to spiritual things and the appointments of God. Especially, if any have been living in unbelief, with no particular religious interest, without God and without hope in the world, the message to such is, "Now saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Joel 2:12, 13. There can be no salvation in sin and disregard of God; and if ever there is to be any participation in his forgiving mercy, men must go to Jerusalem for it, and find it at Calvary's cross. And now that Christendom is about to go up to the contemplation of the mournful scene in which her sins were expiated, Heaven renews its calls to the careless and impenitent to go with them.

And are there none among my hearers to-day to respond to this call? Shall another of these holy seasons pass and not bring those to the sacred heights of salvation who have already so

many times refused? Shall the blessed Christ go up to sacrifice his life for you, and you not go with him to secure what he has purchased at so great a price? O ye worldly-minded and uncircumcised in heart, turn you this day, and let your faces be toward Jerusalem. Let this be the hour to decide you henceforward to improve your time, and to journey with your gracious Lord.

And if any have grown cold and careless who once were found on the way to Zion, this Lenten season comes with solemn appeals to them. The primitive Church chose the beginning of this fast for the exercise of discipline upon all who had been walking unworthy of their calling. It was a time when such had to suffer a public excision from the company and fellowship of believers, or penitently to set themselves to amend their ways, and seek afresh the grace and pardon of their God. It was the season in which backsliders were called to account, and required to answer for their defections. And so the Church still means these Lenten solemnities for the arraignment of every unfaithful member before the bar of his own conscience, and demands of him to answer there for neglects and sins, and either to turn from them, or to take the binding condemnation which excludes from the grace and mercy of God. What matters it that your face was once Zionward—that the great name of God has been called upon you—or that the word of his gracious absolution was once spoken to your soul,—if you now have a different mind, or have since turned

away from journeying with your Lord? Nay, rather, your condemnation is the greater for having known the way of righteousness, and afterwards turned from the holy commandment delivered unto you. 2 Pet. 2:21. By all that is dear and precious, then, let me urge upon you the message of this solemn season, to repent, and to do your first works over again. To your closet and to your prayers, that you may not be overtaken in your faithlessness. "Return, thou backsliding one, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord; only acknowledge and turn away from thine iniquity which thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." Jer. 3: 12, 13.

And for every one who professes to be a disciple of Christ, the word of the Master this day is one that calls for deep and earnest heart-searching. He says to his people, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." Is this really true of us? Are our faces Zionward? Are we journeying with Jesus, and on our way to the holy city? These are questions which we need often to consider, and which these lengthening days now again specially press upon our attention. And to fail to take them home to us for examination, and honest effort to know where we are, and how we might be making better progress, is to fail in an important object had in view in these solemnities. I appeal to you, then, as a minister of the Church of Christ, not to let this Lenten season pass, with

out the necessary endeavors to assure yourselves that you are truly on the way with Jesus.

2. We here behold Christ voluntarily going forward to lay down his life for the sins of the world.

> This was compassion like a God,
> That when the Saviour knew
> The price of pardon was his blood,
> His pity ne'er withdrew.

"Christ pleased not himself." Rom. 15:3. He willingly suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. 1 Pet. 2:21. And it is the spirit of his religion, and the duty of Christians, and above all when about to accompany him through the scenes of his passion, to deny themselves, abjure scenes of gayety and pleasure, abstain from worldly amusements and sober themselves to spiritual duties and seriousness. If your father or mother were dying or lying dead, or if some great and trying danger were upon one you love, you would think it ill-accordant with the proprieties of the case, to indulge in hilarity, or to be found with them that feast and make merry. And how much more should we be checked in our mirth, gayety and worldliness in those solemn days which call to remembrance our Lord's great anguish, from which we derive our only hopes of heaven! O how incongruous to laugh while our Saviour weeps! to make merry while he wrestles in prayer and blood with ou:

sins! to be indulging our carnal appetites and pleasures while he is buffeted, mangled, and dying, that we may not perish forever!

Brethren, piety was not meant to make our comforts less; but it does seem to me a most reasonable and proper thing that these lengthening days, so specially devoted to the commemoration of what is so pre-eminently worthy of such annual remembrance and review, should be spent with a degree of restraint upon all carnal desires and worldly lusts, beyond what is common in modern Christendom. It is at any rate to be charged against the religion of our day, that it has quite too little of the self-denying and self-sacrificing spirit of Jesus in it. It is an easy-minded religion, which carries the world in its arms, and seeks to revel in earthiness and self-pleasing while it communes with God. It is a religion very bold to seize on Christ's promises, but very timid in complying with Christ's commands;—a religion which *hopes* much, but *does* very little;—which claims to be very catholic and loving, but has almost nothing of Christ in it but his name. That men should deny themselves for Christ's sake, sacrifice their passions, abridge their luxuries, mortify their pride, and subordinate every earthly interest and pleasure to the claims of God and the soul, this it grudges, and is slow to admit. It is too much for some even to let themselves be known as Christ's disciples. But, let me assure you, my brethren, that such a religion will not answer. Christ's own words are specific: "If

any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life," or seek to shield and ease himself with compromises, "shall lose it." Matt. 16:24–25. If people cannot give up their worldliness and pleasures, they cannot be Christians. If they are not willing to make sacrifices for Christ, they are none of his. And if they are content to let the contemplation of his passion pass without subduing the tone and temper of their lives and pleasures, it can only be because they have no true heart-interest in it.

3. But, to encourage us in all goodness and self-sacrifice, the text presents a further picture. The way to the cross is the way to the crown. By willingly giving himself to suffering and death, the Saviour attained to a better resurrection—to a glorious triumph over death and hell—and to the dominion and blessedness of a kingdom which is to stand and augment forever. And so for the disciples who went with him. They had sore trials to undergo; but going to Jerusalem the blindness was taken from their hearts. Going with their Lord to his execution they learned to understand him as they could not understand him before, and were made the witnesses and the subjects of wonders which transformed them into heroes of the faith, and advanced them to ministerial thrones, from which they have been ruling for ages. There can be no mistake in what we honestly invest for Jesus. No sacrifices made for

him will ever be lost. And though our discipleship should lead us to trial and the cross, it will not fail to bring us to the city of God, and to the rewards and blessedness of a better life.

And when the child of God comes to take his celestial crown, whatever else he may have to regret, it will not be his sacrifices or self-denial in endeavoring to keep near to the Saviour, or in seeking to exemplify that Saviour's spirit.

Let me beseech you, then, to enter upon these Lenten services with an honest and earnest desire to be Christians indeed. Let go the world, and the ruinous race for its emoluments and honors; and let come whatever inconveniences and discomforts of the flesh an entire consecration to Jesus may impose. It will be only for a few days, and then comes heaven.

Christian, by blood redeemed,
Thou on whose eye hath beamed,
All the glad light that streamed
Forth from the cross;
Roused by that light, awake,
Through every hindrance break,
Counting, for Jesus' sake,
All things but loss.

Seek not on earth thy rest;
Sin has defiled its best;
Thou, as a passing guest,
Rise and depart.
Still let thy radiant eye,
Fixed on thy home on high,
Tell where thy treasures lie,
And where thy heart.

On thy Beloved lean
And in each varied scene,
Desert, or brightly green,
Cling to his side.
Cast upon Him thy care;
He will thy burden bear;
He will thy way prepare;
He will provide.

If in this vale of tears
Rugged the path appears,
Yield not to faithless fears;
In Him confide.
Press with stout heart along,
Cheering thy way with song;
He cannot lead thee wrong,
Who is thy Guide.

Then when thy wanderings close,
Where the dark river flows,
Through which the pilgrim goes
To the bright land;
Be not afraid, nor shrink
From the deep Jordan's brink;
He will not let thee sink
Who holds thy hand.

Soon shall the glorious prize
Beam on thy raptured eyes;
Yonder the city lies
Where is thy rest.
There thou the palm shalt bear;
There thou the crown shalt wear
There thy Lord's glory share,
Forever blessed.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

MATT. 4 1–11. Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

THE sinlessness of Jesus, is one of the corner-stones of the Christian faith. A single transgression on his part, whether by omission or commission, would forever have unfitted him to be the Saviour of the world. If one guilty thought, word, or deed had proceeded from him, the whole plan of grace would have miscarried, and the only light and hope of man would have been extinguished. As

our sacrifice, he had to be spotless; and as our advocate, he had to be justified and approved by the strictest law of righteousness.

But what was so essential to him as our Redeemer, there has been a general, if not universal disposition to award. Whatever else men have denied to Christ, there is wonderful unanimity in the admission that he was a good man. Even atheism and infidelity have freely and eloquently confessed his unsullied purity and his matchless goodness. And to every Christian it is the next thing to blasphemy to give a moment's place to the thought, that our Saviour was anything other than "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." Heb. 7 : 26.

We are not to suppose, however, that Christ was so sinless and spotless by natural necessity, or that his character for perfect purity and righteousness was a possession which cost him nothing. It was a thing which he had to maintain and defend on many a hard-fought field, and which he had to win amid the hot and trying strifes of moral warfare with the powers of darkness and the prince of them. There is an idea, quite too deeply lodged even in good Christian minds, that it was an easy thing for Jesus to be good; that he was born without depravity; that he was sustained and guided by indwelling Godhead; and that there was no possibility of his being otherwise than just the pure being that he was. There is a latent fancy, that he was fortified by the very constitution of his nature against all susceptibili

ties of evil, or solicitations to it. Our just reverence for him often unwittingly drags with it a negation of his proper credit for moral resolve and firmness, and an obscuration of the proper depth and breadth of his real merit. He is, indeed, the only-begotten Son of God. The very fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him. And it was ascertained from the beginning, that the whole length of his mediatorial work would be traversed with the spotlessness of heaven itself. But it is equally true, that everything touching his nature was conditioned to the state of real humanity, embracing all the risks, necessities, and dangers of a true human life and probation. Though infallible and immutable God, he so emptied himself by incarnation, that, in taking our nature, he took with it all its infirmities, hazards, and sorrows. As he thus made himself liable to hunger, pain, tears, and death, so he likewise made himself liable to temptation, sin, and eternal discomfiture. Much as our devout veneration for his Divinity would lead us to shrink from the statement, and whatever mysteries may attend it, we are obliged to admit, either that his sufferings and trials were automatic and unreal, or that he certainly did encounter all the exposure of one who runs the hazards of eternal damnation, and maintained his unsullied character under all the liabilities and felt solicitations which beset human life. If he was true man, as the Scriptures and the creeds affirm; and if "in all things it behooved him to be made

like unto his brethren;" Heb. 2:17; whatever else he may have been, it belonged to that humanity, and to the realities of our state in this sinful world, that he should suffer as we suffer. We also have the clear attestations of Scripture, that he was "made under the law;" that he was "compassed with infirmity;" that he "suffered, being tempted;" that he "can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and that he "*was in all points tempted like as we are.*" Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 5:2. And if our immaculate Lord did not feel the suggestions and solicitations of evil, or suffer the allurements and taunts of the devil, and come into direct contact with sin and all the dreadful horrors which it involves, it is as impossible to find a just meaning for these Divine testimonies, as it is to trace the requisite meritoriousness in his atoning righteousness.

I take it, therefore, as a great and necessary fact, that our Lord was sinless and righteous, not because of a foregone and absolute inability to sin, nor because of the absence of the occasions and causes of sin which harass other men, but simply and only as the result of a heroic and persevering steadfastness under the same conditions and risk which pertain to a true human probation, intensified in proportion to the magnificence of his gracious undertaking. And it is only as we take this with us, that we are prepared to appreciate the nature and worth of what is narrated in the Gospel for this morning.

We are not to suppose that Christ never was

tempted, except at this particular time. His whole life was one of trial. There was not a day of it, which did not bring its contests with wrong and sin. But, in his case, as in the history of every one, there were certain great turning-points, at which the trial was specially sore and deep—times of peril and assault, which brought all his moral strength to the test, and the vibrations of which were felt in the very depths of his mysterious nature—times when the holiness of his Godhead was assailed with solicitations to sin, as his divine immortality was touched by the power of death on the cross. And such a time was that which the text describes.

I. *Note how it was brought about.* Two agencies were concerned in it. The first was God himself. It was the will and motion of the Holy Ghost, which brought him to the field. He was "led up of the Spirit." All three of the evangelists take notice of this fact. "God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." James 1 : 13. But there is no temptation in which there is nothing Divine. God has made life a trial, and when temptation comes, it is because of God's arrangement and permission. And so, if not still more specially, was God concerned in leading Christ into these conflicts. It was necessary to the object of his mission that he should encounter them, and so it was the will and impulse of the Spirit which conducted him to the arena. If Christ had himself, and of his own accord, rushed into tempta-

tion, there would have been a presumption about it, which would itself have been a Satanic victory. He therefore awaited the Spirit's guidance, and meekly acquiesced in the Divine will. As it was divinely appointed unto him to suffer and die, so it was divinely appointed unto him to meet Satan, and to withstand whatever assaults his malignant subtlety might invent. The Spirit did not make the temptation, nor the occasion of it; but as it had to be, in order to the great ends of salvation, and as the accomplishment of those ends was the object for which Christ came into the world, the Holy Ghost went with him, and conducted him, as he went forward to this first stage of his amazing sufferings for the sins of the world.

The temptation itself was the work of "the devil." This is affirmed in all three of the accounts. The description throughout sets forth a personal existence—a living and self-acting agent—of great subtlety and power, to whom Mark assigns a proper name. Some doubt the existence of such a malignant being. But, strangely enough, the people that believe the least about him, are those who are in deepest sympathy and fellowship with him. It is one of his most successful artifices to persuade men that there is no such creature as he. But, if people will take the plain records of revelation, they will have no skepticism on this subject. From the first accounts of the race to the last, the sacred writers never lose sight of some great, malignant spiritual power, the adversary of God and all good, who deceived

our first parents in Eden, and whose disastrous influence has tracked all human history with evil. He is described as the centre of an empire of fallen spirits, which has eaten its way into the glorious creation of God, usurped the dominion of the earth, and rules in all the children of disobedience. Rationalism insists that God is too good and gracious to allow the existence of a power so vast and so ruinous. But human reason is quite too feeble to tell in advance what God can do consistently with himself, or what he cannot; and the same arguments have equal weight against the existence of wicked men, and depraved governments and powers in this world. It is a matter of fact and common experience, that there is potent crime, and destructive vice, and malignant passion, and evil, and distress, all over the earth, and disastrously prevalent in all the ages of human history; and if there is *human* liberty for evil, why not *angelic* also? If it is inconsistent with Divine excellence to permit it in the one case, it is equally so in the other. And as the one is indisputable, the other cannot be argued impossible, or even improbable. And when the Scriptures tell us so distinctly of one Satan, insinuating himself into the assembly of the sons of God in heaven, Job 2:1; imposing his lies upon our first parents, Gen. 3:4; resisting the pious ministrations of the prophets, Zech. 3:1, 2; seeking to destroy the integrity of the Son of God, Luke 4:2; ruling in the hearts of men and the powers of earth as the very prince and god of this dispensation, 2

Cor. 4 : 4; and holding the world in his infernal embraces, 1 John 5 : 19, it is itself explicable only as an instigation of Satanic perverseness for men to undertake to say there is no such thing as "the devil." At any rate, however he may succeed in hiding away his existence and malignity from his own children, when Jesus came to take possession of the world, he was found, and showed himself in his true character, and did not hesitate to make his subtle stabs at the purity of the very Son of God.

Exactly in what form or method Satan approached and dealt with the Saviour in these hellish attempts, is not said. The natural import of the words would suggest that he appeared in bodily shape, and conversed audibly with him, and bore him bodily to the temple's pinnacle and the mountain's summit. Luther says: "I think that the devil appeared to him in corporeal form, perhaps as an angel." And with all the difficulties suggested against this view, no one is safe in quite rejecting it. Like the account of the first temptation, after all the criticism, surmising, and philosophizing that has been produced, the easiest interpretation, and the freest from difficulties and from the dangers of false inferences, is to take the narrative just as it would strike the common reader. We are never safe when we begin to explain away the literal declarations of the Holy Ghost, who certainly knew how to say what he meant. Yet some affirm that the thing occurred after the style of a supernatural vision. The truth

is, we do not know how it was, neither is it necessary that we should. That it was the devil's work, is plain enough; and all his power and subtlety were brought into exercise to drag the spotless Son of God into sin.

II. *Note the time of it.* Two particulars appear in all three accounts.

1. It was immediately after very miraculous and exalting experiences. Coming up from the waters of Baptism, where John had identified him as the Christ, "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3:16, 17. It was a sublime and wonderful occurrence, by which, perhaps for the first time in his earthly life, he was brought to a full personal consciousness of his Divine nature and mission. And it was just in the glow and triumph of this extraordinary honor and blessedness that Satan made his assault upon him. As people of evil mind hide under the lamps meant to light the way for virtuous men, so the devil uses God's blessings to the saints. Periods of great quickening and joy, are the times he makes his greatest efforts and his greatest conquests. It was at such an hour that he took Noah and Lot, and that Saul of Tarsus felt his fiercest buffetings. It is when we are exalted to the third heaven, that his messengers are sent. Signal

mercies are ever sure to bring signal dangers. When the heart is taken up with great joys and high favors, then he draws near, and makes his deadliest endeavors. The sun shines, and the day is prosperous, and he expects our gladness to blind us to his approaches, and to disarm us against his insinuations.

2. It was just as he was about to go forward to the great work of his Messiahship. While he remained quiet at Nazareth, no special assault was made; but as soon as he was publicly recognized, and began to move in the high objects for which he was born, then the tempter came. As long as Satan sees people at ease, or that nothing effective is being undertaken, so long he will give himself no special concern about them; but when God's servants gird themselves for duty, and outlines for great achievements are on hand, his devil nature cannot rest, and his storms begin to blow. Find me a man of honest mind, dogged with detraction, hated, persecuted, whom many love to stab in secret, and whom the world reviles and Satan specially torments, and I will show you one who is doing much for truth, and God, and righteousness, and whose works and efforts are telling in right directions, and will tell for ages. When arrows fly among the dogs, the fiercer the snarls, and the louder the howls, the surer is the evidence that some have been hit. The man of easy life, of whom all the world speaks well, whose foibles no one notices, and whose course leads through

no wilderness of temptation and conflict, will never storm the battlements of hell, or stand in the breach in the day of necessity, or lead in the onset which brings the triumph. Half-hearted men, and compromise men, and expediency men, and men of no aggression, the devil will tolerate, and leave to do with common trials; for they are in effect on his side, at any rate not to be feared. But the Christ, and the Christ-like, who give themselves to service for God, these he cannot abide; and for them he prepares his hottest trials, and reserves his mightiest efforts. Though roaming in fierceness, and ready and anxious to devour whatever prey he can find, his attention is always arrested when he beholds some servant of Jehovah buckling on the armor, or drawing out the sword. Then his malignity is roused, and he says to himself, "I will assault him while he is young in the war. I will come upon him before he expects the foe. I will waylay him as he goeth forth to the battle. I will shake his faith at the beginning. I will deceive him with the hopes of an easy victory. I will crowd his path with adversities to turn him back. I will strike him in his most tender places." Hence the hungers and horrors of the wilderness before the works and words of wonder, and the agonies of the garden and the cross before the ascension and the crown.

III. *Note, also, the place.*—"In the wilderness," "with the wild beasts." The region can easily be identified. The Jordan is lined on either side

with a level plain, from two to six miles wide On the west, from where John was baptizing, this plain is bounded with a very high and abrupt mountain, whose steep and rocky sides are full of caves and dens of wild beasts, and whose summit is almost inaccessible. It was to these rugged and untenanted wilds that the Saviour retired after his baptism and sublime experiences at the river. So exalted a mission, the great duties of which were now about to begin, called for a little season of solitude and prayer to think over the nature of what was to be done, and to adjust the method of procedure and himself to the character of the work. Great religious reformers have always come to their places from secret struggles and experiences in which their revolutions were first fought through in their own hearts in private. Moses was taken from the court into the wilds of Arabia, to spend years alone with himself and his God before he is sent with redemption to enslaved Israel. John the Baptist was hid away in long seclusion from men before he appeared in that sudden and marvellous revolution which prepared the way for Christ. Saul of Tarsus went from his conversion into long solitude and communion with God to adjust himself to the new world of duty and responsibility to which Jesus had called him. Luther went through the spiritual throes of the Reformation, and was fashioned to its leadership, in the private cell of the monastery. And so the Saviour himself was turned aside from the presence and observation of men into retirement and

fasting, to fight the battle through in his own soul before going forward to embody it in outward form and act. Oh, how much depth of spiritual earnestness, attainment and efficiency is often lost for want of being more alone with God and ourselves! How many souls are starved, feeble, and sickly, just for want of seclusion from ever-pressing business, cares, and company, to learn a little of themselves, their Bibles, and their God! We need solitude as well as society, and private communings with our Maker and Lord, as much as comminglings with the saints. Nor can any one be great and robust in faith and spiritual power, who knows nothing of devout retirement and the wilderness.

But solitude has its dangers as well as its advantages. Because we have succeeded in shutting ourselves away from the din of the world, we are not to suppose that we, therefore, are safe. The devil is in the wilderness, as well as in the highway, and in the crowds and thoroughfares of life. He laughs at bolts and bars, and is "in the secret place" as well as upon the public street. Nay, it is his wont to come the nearest when no one else is near. In the common world he works through his agents; in solitude he is himself present, and plies with the greatest subtlety. The most numerous and the most horrible of crimes are those of secresy. It is when alone that we are besieged with unseen enemies, who choose such seasons to pollute our imaginations, debauch our souls, and take possession of roving and discontented hearts.

Noah stood like a rock of righteousness in the midst of a world flooded with sin; yet, when that world was gone, alone in his solitary tent, he fell. All the vileness of Sodom and Gomorrah could not corrupt Lot; but on the lonely mountains of Zoar he was unmanned by his own lusts. And nowhere did the blessed Saviour encounter so much infernal treachery and solicitation to sin as in the solitude of the wilderness.

Nevertheless, it was the place of victory. Thither the Spirit led him, and there it was that his first great triumph was won. Just where so many good men have fallen, his sublimest successes begun. And there will men always find the theatre of their greatest spiritual achievements.

IV. *Note the nature and subtlety of Satan's assaults.* —In three different forms did he make his attempts. God had just announced his pleasure in Jesus, and acknowledged him as His beloved child. Satan heard and envied that announcement. He would see whether he could not spoil the beautiful picture, and put a silence upon this celestial gladness. He would see if he could not cloud that pure heart, and taint that spotless Lamb, and throw sand into this machinery of redemption. Though it could not benefit him, he would see if he could not hurt this champion of heaven, and spoil his calculations. "I will try this Christ of theirs. I will give him work for his wages. I will see what stuff his righteousness is made of. And if I cannot crush him, I will make him feel

the weight of my power, and the shock of battle." Thus the tempter approached.

Forty days and forty nights of solitary fasting passed, and, as yet, no impression was made upon Christ's unsullied heart. He was now "an hungered," and wasted nature began to give alarm against approaching starvation. Now was the time to make the most of the desires of the flesh. There was a chance to appeal at once to all the cravings of hunger, and to all the sweet confidence of an assured divine sonship. Satan saw the opportunity, and embraced it. We are left in no doubt as to how the case was put. "Jesus of Nazareth, I perceive that you are ready to die of starvation here in the wilderness. I have understood how God has acknowledged you as his own Son. I doubt not the precious testimony which marks you as the sublimest and mightiest of all of woman born. Why, then, do you thus let your power slumber while starvation is upon you? The Son of God, and the favorite of heaven, certainly need suffer no such wants. Let him speak the word only, and the stones shall turn to bread. And now, as you believe what God hath spoken, consider that you are the Son of God, and command these stones to be made bread, and eat, instead of perishing with hunger like a miserable mortal." It was a strong appeal; and most men would have eagerly embraced the suggestion. No great sin seemed to be involved, and a feeling of apparent sympathy clothed the proposal. In so desolate a place, with no other resources at hand,

quite a plausible apology for compliance might have been framed. But little sins, and fair-looking sins, are the most dangerous of all sins. Had the Saviour complied, he would have put his power under the devil's direction, and eaten of the devil's bread. Better to starve in the wilderness, Son of God as he was, than exercise his almightiness according to the devil's instigation. He therefore declined, leaning himself upon the assurance that "man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The ground of the Saviour's victory in this assault, was made the basis for the next. He had overcome the flesh by his faith in the Divine word; would he continue thus to trust in every case? Perhaps he could be reached through his faith. An occasion was soon arranged. By some unexplained method, the emaciated Saviour was carried to Jerusalem, and set upon one of the highest projections of the temple. Weak, and suspended over dizzy heights, again Satan addressed him. "Jesus of Nazareth, and Son of God! I have seen how excellent and unfaltering is your faith in the promises and declarations of holy Scripture. I have found how meekly you can rest on what is written, and thus appease the pangs of hunger and the approaches of starvation. I see you now in dreadful peril. You are weak. Your life is in jeopardy, whether you stay or try to descend. But I find a very precious promise given of God concerning you. It is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and

in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.' Now, then, believe in what is written, and let go your hold, and thus relieve your dreadful peril." It was a more subtle temptation than the first. It founded itself directly upon God's word, and seemed to contain the only possible way to escape the danger. It took in all the power of the preceding, and added new considerations in the exact line in which he had previously conquered. Many noble natures and well-meaning people does Satan ruin by giving false turns to their religious feelings, and perverting what would otherwise make for their credit and salvation. False faith and spurious religion have destroyed more and better men than atheism and unbelief ever hurried to perdition. And it were a thousand times better to starve on the temple's roof, or be dashed to atoms among Kedron's rocks, than to confide even in words of Scripture, wrested from their proper place and rightful application. Hence, answering Satan's Scripture with God's Scripture, which says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," the meek and lowly Jesus declined the proposed experiment, and stood unshaken in his victory over the tempter's deceitful cunning.

There remained yet one other opportunity. A long list of pains and sufferings, and ages of waiting, conflict, and delay, still lay before the Saviour and his people ere his final victory should be realized. Years of poverty, and toil, and prayers —the agonies of the garden, the ignominy of the

cross, and the horrors of death—the sufferings of the Church, and the martyrdom of the saints, and woes that stretched through centuries—were the costs at which alone the kingdoms of this world could become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ. Perhaps he would be moved by a proposal to capitulate, and accept a surrender which should exempt from delay, and shame, and grief. So the tempter took him, and showed him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," and offered to give him all, without a battle, and at once, if only a corresponding acknowledgment were made. "All these things will I give thee"—the cross shall be unnecessary —the slow processes of conquering dominion, and its cost of blood, and tears, and toils shall be spared —"if thou wilt fall down and worship me." It was indeed a lying promise, and a most infamous proposal; but to covetous and self-seeking human nature, it would have been thought a charming chance, by no means to be despised. Not so did the Saviour view it. Better die a thousand times, and suffer through a thousand centuries, than give sacred honors to the devil. And though wasted down next thing to death, and knowing well what expense it would require to secure those kingdoms, not for an instant would he seek to save it to himself or people at such an instigation, much less at such a price. How full of righteous indignation, and charged with judgment on his impious tormentor was his reply: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou

shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

V. *Note the result.*—"The devil left him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." The first great crisis was passed. The victory was won. And the repulsion of the evil was the attraction of the good. While the dreadful conflict lasted, hell stood at bay, and heaven in waiting; but when it ended, the champion of the one marched off in sullen acknowledgment of the Saviour's mastery, and the loving messengers of the other, "on full sail of wing, flew nigh," laden with comforts and plenteous consolations. In place of Satan's bread of stones, the patient sufferer had bread from heaven. Without the devil's presumptuous call for the help of angels, they joyously came of their own accord in honor of such meek obedience. And without thanks to the generosity of hell, a world of higher glory than that of this world's kingdoms opened out to him the treasures of its comforts and its praise.

Oh, the blessedness and the triumphs of submissive obedience. There is a power in holy meekness which vanquishes all malignant powers, and secures companionship with celestial princes. Let us, then, learn the lesson of self-denial, and fidelity, and patience, leaning on the word of our God. This will give us strength against all the assaults of the wicked one. This will enable us to outride whatever storms or privations earth may have for us to bear. Satan is now a con-

quered foe. Christ has bruised his head, and mutilated his power. We have only to imitate the example our Lord has set us, and we too shall share in the gracious ministrations of angels, and in the consolations of an everlasting heaven.

Let us be patient—God's best gifts
Come on the wings of care and pain,
And threefold love in suffering lifts
The crown which we through grieving gain.

It is not hard that we should bear
What Christ our brother bore before;
Let us rejoice that God's good care
Will bless and cleanse, however sore.

Then up and on! though dark your sky,
E'en now a faint streak marks the dawn.
The tear that falls from mercy's eye
Will heal your wounds, though rough and torn

The cross, by you in suffering borne,
Shall catch, from Calvary's hill a gleam,
The martyr's fire—tried wreath of thorn—
In heaven a virgin crown shall beam.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

Matt. 15 : 21–28. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word.

And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

WE have seen the blessed Saviour in retirement, suffering the evil solicitations of the devil, and overcoming him. In this morning's Gospel, we follow him into another retirement, and behold him besieged with another solicitation, and, so to speak, overcome by it. The one was a victory for purity, meekness, and righteousness; the other was a surrender to faith, prayer, and suffering importunity. And it is difficult which to admire most, or to decide which is the more comforting and encouraging to the people of God in their conflicts with unbelief, sin, and trouble: the triumph in the one case, or the surrender in the other. Both involved most

hopeful mastery over Satan, and both are full of instruction and helpful consolation to the distressed and anxious spirit. And having looked at the one, let us now devoutly turn our attention to the other.

We find the Saviour, on this occasion, in the extreme northwest of the land of Canaan—in "the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." Wearied and pained with the growing malignity and unbelief of the religious leaders of the Jews, and to avoid for a time the snares of Herod, he had quietly retired to this region for a little seclusion and repose. He had exerted himself most graciously to bring the Scribes and Pharisees to a knowledge of the truth, but no impression was made upon their bigoted and self-righteous souls. Instead of giving heed to his words, authenticated as they were with the miraculous attestations of God, they sent out delegations to bait him with their cavils, and had just given new proofs of their determination not to be convinced. And with words of rebuke, which showed the gradual retirement of grace from their hard hearts, foretokening the certain perdition which they were bringing upon themselves, he turned his face away from them, and retreated to the regions of the Gentiles.

He had given directions that the place of his retirement should not be made known; but so great a light could not be concealed. His fame had gone before him, even to Tyre and Sidon; and the knowledge of his presence in those coasts

could not be hidden. Among those who became acquainted with the fact of his arrival, was a suffering heathen mother, whose house the demons had invaded, and whose daughter was grievously afflicted with their influence. By one of those mysterious promptings which are the forerunners of salvation, she came crying unto him for relief from her sore domestic trouble. And though a Gentile, and a mere borderer on the holy land and people, she became the heroine of an adventure, as wonderful in its features, as it was successful in its issues, and instructive in its character.

I. *Notice the discouragements which she overcame.* These were numerous, great, and increased as she proceeded.

1. The first was the seeming unwillingness of the Saviour to have his retirement disturbed by any one, in any way. Mark says, "He retired into an house, and would have no man know it:" 7:24. Having given expression to such a wish, it is not likely that his disciples, and those about him, would have left the way of access to him very free. Much as they may have felt warranted in presuming upon his goodness, they certainly could not have so far disregarded his expressed feelings, as to encourage the disturbance of his repose by favoring the suit of a heathen woman. But, whatever hindrances of this kind may have been encountered, she heroically met and vanquished them.

2. Her case was itself a very unpromising one. She was a Gentile. The Saviour was a Jew. There was a high national and religious wall between them, which she had to scale. She knew in what contempt the Jews held all other people, and what uncleanness they attached to contact with them. She knew, also, that the more rigid and exalted the saintship of these worshippers at Jerusalem, the more intense were these lines of separation. And it was no easy thing to venture into the face of such repellant scruples.

3. But, having overcome all these, and brought her cry to the Saviour's ears, she next encountered a coldness in his own behavior, which seemed to disdain the least attention to her. Though she cried to him with weeping eyes and beseeching words, "he answered her not." He was not really indifferent, neither did he act hypocritically towards her. It would be ascribing to Christ something very unchristlike, and at variance with the narrative itself, to affirm either. His hardness of manner, was a part of his mercy in the case. It more strongly brought out the faith of the suppliant, and it more fully explained much in the ordinary administrations of his gracious providence. It was also due to his character as a minister of the Law,—and to his mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," that he should not be too forward in his answers to the calls of the Gentiles. It is also manifest that his silence was felt on all hands as a discourage

ment, at which many would have given up the suit. But it only stimulated her to more earnest entreaties.

4. The conduct of the disciples introduced a still further dissuasion, well calculated to dampen her hope of success. As they knew that Christ wished to be undisturbed, they themselves soon began to be annoyed by her importunity, and prayed him to "send her away." Such unchivalrous and selfish harshness was of a sort to make the poor woman feel that she had come upon a party from whom but little was to be expected.

5. To this was added the still further disheartening answer of the Master: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Apart from all personal disposition, this seemed to interpose a barrier from the laws and restrictions of grace itself. It was beyond the direct ministry of Christ, that he should propose his saving mercy to any but the Jewish people. Rejected by them, it was indeed to be offered to the Gentiles; but, until that rejection was consummated, and the Saviour's earthly ministry ended, there could be no putting of the heathen upon an equality with the chosen people. And the announcement of this fact to this heathen suppliant, must have fallen like a leaden weight upon her afflicted heart. The natural inference to be drawn was: "Then I am shut out. Then there is no hope for me. Then I may as well go home, and make the best

with the devils that are in my house and ruining my child." But no; there was an importunity of faith which triumphed over all the conclusions of reason and logic. "Then she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me." And yet she had not surmounted all the dissuasions and obstacles in her way.

6. Children's bread was not to be given to dogs. This was the current spirit of the religion of the times. And though the Saviour, in expressing this proverb, began to show a little softening toward the woman, and really laid down to her the means of her success, it would have been to many a sealing-up of all hope. To any but the ready wit and profound humility of faith, it would have been an end of the matter. It assigned to her the place of a dog, unclean, and without claim. But it excited neither anger nor despair. She acquiesced in the representation as just and right, but drew from it new impulse, and weapons of strength for her cause. Assuming that she was but a worthless dog, as compared with the family of Israel, yet, even the dogs get the crumbs and offal from the table where the children feed. Could she not, even as a dog, still hope for a crumb? Let the great storehouse of God's grace be reserved for Israel, might she not have this little morsel, which would be to her so precious? "Truth, Lord: It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their Master's

table." This Luther commends as a master-stroke, conquering the Saviour on h s own ground. She persevered until she found a Yea in his apparent Nay.

The struggle was hard, but the triumph was complete. Jesus said, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." He put the sword within her reach, and she grasped it, and won the day.

II. *Notice the means of her victory.* These were simple, easily traceable, and eminently worthy of every one's imitation.

1. She felt her need, and the true character of her affliction. Satan had invaded her house. Her daughter was grievously vexed with a devil. And she realized the nature of her sufferings. All sorrow is from sin, and all sin is from the devil. She was aware of the existence of a malignant power, whose agency is the great grief of our world, and under whose dominion she had fallen. It was not only the outward distress that troubled her, but more especially the presence and power of its source—the horribleness of being at the mercy of such infernal potency. To live with the spirits of devils, and to be subject to their malice and caprice,—this was the burden of her grief, and from which her soul longed to be free. By nature, we are all the children of wrath, and the whole world lieth in the arms of the wicked one. Satan is in every home, and rules in every house, and sits enthroned in every heart, where the dis-

possessing power of Christ has not been sought and welcomed. And the first step to salvation is, to be made sensible of this fact, and to feel and comprehend the misery of such a state. This is the starting-point of all successful prayer, and of all true Christian life, as it was of this woman's application to Christ, and of her victory with him.

2. She credited what she had heard of him. Evidently she had not heard much. She was not at all in a condition to be accurate or full in her information. But, blessed be God, it takes no great amount of learning to make a saving approach to Jesus. She knew that he was the promised Son of David; that he was more than a man; that he had power over Satan and his demons; and that he was then in the neighborhood. Thus much she had heard; and what she had heard, she believed. It was not a mere experiment, with no particular expectation of being relieved, as people with fatal diseases sometimes try new doctors, that she applied to Jesus; but she saw in him, from the first, the one who was able to help her. She was satisfied that he had the power, that Satan could not stand before him, and that all she needed to have her heart's desire fulfilled was, to enlist the Saviour in her behalf. And this confidence was the foundation of her success. It is not so much the fulness and accuracy of our knowledge, the excellence of our scholarship, or our skill in the niceties of theo-

logical distinctions and definitions, that constitutes our strength in Christianity; but it is the credit we give to the great facts of the Gospel, the confidence we have in Christ's Messiahship and competency to help us, the persuasion that we have in him the adorable messenger of God, against whom no powers of evil can stand. It is, of course, important to be as fully and clearly informed concerning Christ as can be; but it is still more vitally important that we believe and act on what we know. There is more hope for a heathen woman, drawn to him with the simple persuasion that he is her salvation, though not knowing precisely the implications and boundaries of her faith, than for the most renowned and skilful theologian, content with his knowledge and orthodoxy, without making it the spring of an active, prayerful, and devoted seeking unto his Lord and Redeemer. We must needs hear of Christ; but our hearing is nothing, unless we believe what we hear, and make it the basis of an obedient and worshipful throwing of ourselves as petitioners at his feet. A little knowledge, with a full and lively faith, is worth more than all the wisdom of the doctors where such childlike confidence is wanting. Whatever else you may know and believe, the most essential thing of all is, to be fully persuaded that Christ is your remedy, sent of God with power to help to the full extremity of your need, and to go to him in implicit confidence, that he is all you require. This is what moved and controlled this Syro-phœnician

mother, and that constituted one great element of her success.

3. And, believing as she did, she improved her opportunity. Jesus was in the neighborhood. He had never been there before; and he never was there afterward. That was, therefore, her time; and she took immediate advantage of it. She did not delay, thinking that he would come nearer; or put off the matter, supposing that it would do as well at another time; or wait until she could have company on a similar errand. She would expose her hopes to no contingencies —no risks. The Lord was within reach. Her distress was grievous. The necessary and competent helper was at hand. She would go while she had a chance. Other sufferers in those coasts were quite as well informed about Christ as herself; but we hear of no cures but hers. The reason is, that she promptly improved her opportunities, whilst they did not. God's grace has its times and seasons. There are periods when he comes particularly near. There are moments of decision in every one's history, when the tide of mercy is at its flood, which, if rightly improved, carry to salvation, but which, if neglected, never return again. Perhaps there is no case in which there does not come a moment of spiritual crisis, when, once for all, the way the man moves settles his destiny forever. Nor can any one know, when the offers of the Gospel are before him, whether, if then put aside, they will ever be repeated. This

very day, O prayerless man! if you allow it to go by without opening your heart to the Saviour, may seal your eternal perdition. The reason why so many fail of salvation is, that they know not the time of their visitation, and neglect to go to Christ when he is at hand. This woman seized her opportunity, and succeeded; and if any one would make sure of Divine help, let him seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

4. She confessed her unworthiness. There could be no deeper expression of humility than that which her conduct showed. She spoke in terms of the profoundest veneration. She prostrated herself at the Saviour's feet in the lowliest reverence. She was willing to be considered a dog, with no claim even to the crumbs of the children's bread. She made it the burden of her application, that thus far she had been the companion of devils. She made no apology in her own favor, but threw herself as an unworthy suppliant on the Saviour's mercy, and plead for just such help as he in his goodness was willing to confer. She was satisfied if she got only the portion of a dog. It was this humbleness that constituted one of the great elements of her success. God says: "To this man will I look, even to him who is of an humble and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Is. 66 : 2. The self-consequential Pharisee, who stands apart from the rest of mankind, and thanks God that he is not as

other men, and recites his goodness to the Almighty as a ground for his hope, must ever keep his condemnation, and remain unblessed in his devotions. It is the poor publican, who feels his shame, and pleads only his own guilty wretchedness, and throws himself self-condemned on his Saviour's mercy, that is heard in heaven, and takes hold on forgiveness. Nothing so bars the way of salvation as self-conceit. And it is only when we learn to see and confess that we are nothing but sinful dust and ashes, and can without insult and resentment say "Truth, Lord," to the sentence which denounces us as unclean outcasts, that we are in the way of securing the Divine help.

5. This woman had a true and powerful faith. She believed that Christ was able to help her. She confessed his Lordship. She worshipped him as the Author of salvation. She adored him as the sublime possessor of all the prerogatives and powers necessary for her deliverance. And she had confidence in his goodness. There was no question in her mind as to who he was; and her faith in him was without bounds, and her confession of it without reserve. And, after all, this is the great element of triumph. It is the spring of all heroism—the very instrument of salvation. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5 : 4.

"From Abel's worship, on to Samuel's word,
Faith was the magic which all wonders did.
. . . Whatever in the kingdom's three,

Of Nature, Providence, or Grace, was done,—
Faith was the doer, at whose potent cry
Empires, and thrones, and alien armies, fell,
Weakness grew strength, the mortal half Divine."

Nay, Heaven itself has consented to be at the command of faith. It nerves man, and it moves God. And nothing so certainly and infallibly heralded this poor woman's success, as her confident and unfaltering faith. Mountains might be overthrown, the elements might fail, the planets might stop in their courses, the universe itself might fall into annihilation, rather than that Syrophœnician suppliant return to her home with such a confidence unblessed. Everything is pledged to faith. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" John 11 : 40.

6. And as the result of her faith, this woman was invincible in her prayers. Instead of allowing herself to be silenced by difficulties, they only stimulated her exertions. The cold indifference which met her first application, then the selfish and uncourteous wish of the disciples to be rid of her, then the repulse from the seeming restrictions of grace itself, and then the intimation that she belonged to the mere dogs of society,—all, instead of cooling her ardor, inflamed it; and instead of repressing her prayers, inspired them with increased energy. It was the repetition on heathen ground, of what gave to Jacob his highest and

most significant name. It was another wrestle with the Lord, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Gen. 32:26. And as in the case of the ancient patriarch, so in this, the Lord yielded to her entreaty, and granted her request. "Her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Such humility, such faith, such diligence, and such importunity, could not go unblest. They are all-conquering and unconquerable. At their fiat all barriers fall down and disappear, and before their flame all difficulties melt to nothingness. Hindrances only nurse them into greater power, and, like the obstructions thrown in the way of streams, augment their force and majesty.

III. *Notice the Lessons which this case teaches.* I can refer but briefly to a few.

1. It impressively reminds us of the sorrowful condition of human life. Satan is abroad in the world. His power is everywhere felt. His burdens are upon men in every station and relation on earth. Every heart, every home, every country is full of grief, vexation, and suffering, as the result of his wicked machinations. All sin is from him; and sin is full of misery; and sin is everywhere. Whether we be Jews or Gentiles, heathen or Christian, every circle has its possessed ones—its daughters of sorrow—its mothers of heavy heart. And the brightest of earthly joys are surrounded and overlaid with trouble.

Bits of gladness and of sorrow,
Strangely crossed and interlaid;
Bits of cloudbelt and of rainbow,
In deep alternate braid;
Bits of storm when winds are warring,
Bits of calm when blasts are stay'd,
Bits of silence and of uproar,
Bits of sunlight and of shade;

Now the garland, now the coffin,
Now the wedding, now the tomb;
Now the festal shout of thousands,
Now the churchyard's lonely gloom.
Now the song above the living,
Now the chant above the dead;
The smooth smile of infant beauty,
Age's wan and furrowed head.

Bits of brightening and of darkening,
Bits of weariness and rest;
All the hoping and despairing
Of the full or hollow breast;
Bits of slumbering and of waking,
Heavy tossing to and fro;
Shreds of living and of dying,
Being's daily ebb and flow;

With these is life begun and closed,
Its strange Mosaic thus composed;
Such are our annals upon earth,
Our tale from very hour of birth.

2. But this morning's Gospel assures us where our help is. Jesus has come into our neighborhood. He has come with all his almighty power and goodness. We know the house he has entered, and the place where his gracious presence

abides. We are but Gentiles, but he has visited even us. We are without claims upon him, but he is the Lord of grace and salvation, and his mercy is as great as his ability. There may be much to discourage and hinder our approaches to him; but there is help and consolation in him, and in him only. He needs but to speak the word, and these storms will be hushed, these grievous vexations cease, and these burdened hearts rejoice. There is no home, but he can free it of its troubles; and no wounded spirit, but he can impart to it the desired healing.

Arrayed in mortal flesh,
He like an angel stands,
And holds the promises
And pardons in his hands;
Commissioned from his Father's throne,
To make his grace to mortals known.

3. The same indicates how to avail ourselves of his great mercies. We must carry our burdens to him. We must devoutly urge our distresses upon his attention, and cry to him for help. And whatever dissuasions or obstacles may come in to hinder us, we must humbly but perseveringly press our appeal, never once permitting ourselves to think of failure. People sometimes tell us they cannot pray; or cannot feel in prayer; or have so many wicked things rising in their minds to hinder when they attempt to pray. They speak of doubts, distractions, wandering thoughts, listlessness, and a hundred things to

disturb, weaken, and destroy their satisfaction in seeking to draw near to God. But, be the difficulties what they may, this is the remedy. We must allow nothing to stop our praying. We must still pray on. This takes hold on God, and brings the blessing down. It may not come as promptly as we expect or wish. Faith and patience may be kept on trial for a time. The Saviour may be silent on first application. He may not let his merciful intent be seen in the second. The difficulties may thicken, and the encouragements diminish with every new attempt. But we must still pray on. This is the way to salvation.

4. Precious encouragement, also, does this day's Gospel bring us. Though Jesus cannot be moved by Satan's power, he can be moved by a heathen woman's prayers. Even when he seems to turn a deaf ear, his loving heart is planning mercy; and repulse and delay are themselves a gracious answer. They are the harbingers and conditions of augmented blessing. They are given to develop our faith, test our sincerity, and make the triumph more precious when it comes. Nor does it matter what the subject of our desires may be, just so that it is conditioned to the wise and holy will of God. Whatsoever we have need of, that are we at liberty to ask,—whatsoever we need for ourselves, our children, our households, our bodies, or our souls. We cannot expect a holy God to help us in doing wrong. We dare not ask him to bless us in wickedness, and mere

selfishness. But for anything for which his good providence is established, or his grace is offered, we may come freely to him, and ask his interposition and blessing. And he has given promise that we shall receive, if we pray in faith. "Is any man afflicted? Let him pray." Whether it be a soul affliction, or a body affliction, or a domestic affliction, or of whatever sort, the apostolic direction is, "Let him pray." Whether the want be little or great, for himself or for others, the word is the same, "Let him pray." Nor need any one be kept back from asking for fear of asking what may not be good for him. None of us know for what things to pray as we ought. But we can safely leave that to God. He will determine whether what we ask is proper for us or not. We need not intrude ourselves into his province. He will see to it that his praying ones are not injured by what they ask. Whatever oppresses us we may carry to him, and plead with him to be merciful to us. If he will not remove the thorn, he will give grace to endure it. Every heartache, every sorrow, is a fit subject for prayer, and for which we are encouraged to come to him for help.

From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat,
'Tis found beneath the Mercy-seat.

There is a place where Jesus sheds
The oil of gladness on our heads,
A place than all besides more sweet—
It is the blood-bought Mercy-seat.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

Luke 11 : 14–28. And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake, and the people wondered.

But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.

And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.

But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.

And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

THE particular case of suffering referred to in this morning's Gospel, presents a life-picture of the condition in which Christ finds men. Whether a man, or a woman, we are not informed; but it was one of those cases,

in which demons of darkness incorporated themselves with men, turned their bodies into living tombs, engrossed and perverted all their powers, and so merged the fiend with the elements of the man as to make him "the habitation of dragons," and the instrument and victim of hell's malicious uncleanness. It was a case of real and most unhappy obsession—a human being entered by some spirit from the underworld, and robbed of hearing, speech, and vision.

There is an empire of evil in the universe. Its dominion stretches over every unregenerate child of Adam. It is also the nature of that enslavement to shut the eyes, and stop the ears, and tie the tongue, to everything sacred. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2: 14. He has no right perception of God, or of the ways of truth. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2 Cor. 4: 4. And they are as deaf as they are blind. They hear not the voice of God. "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." Is. 58: 4, 5. They perceive not what God's declared will is, and they answer not to any of his calls, and cannot be taught obedience. And they are as dumb, as they are blind and deaf. No words of prayer or praise, or intelligible utter-

ances concerning Christ and the grace of God, or speech to edify the soul and guide it to salvation, ever issue from their lips. Their language is only "earthly, sensual, devilish." James 3 : 15. With all their eloquence, loquaciousness, and vivacity, when godliness is the topic they are instantly silent, as "dumb dogs which cannot bark." In their own unhallowed sphere, they are keen-sighted enough; and are even "wiser in their generation than the children of light." There they can see, and hear, and speak; but when it comes to spiritual things, and the right knowledge of God and Christ, and the obedience of faith, their best senses are all under the devil's power, and they can neither see, nor hear, nor speak.

But Christ dislodges this dumb and benumbing spirit. It is his office, and the intent of his mission and Gospel, to destroy the dominion of Satan, and to give liberty, sight, hearing, and speech to those whom hell has enslaved. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3 : 8. This was his work when he was upon earth; for this he has constituted and endowed his Church; and this he will continue, until Satan shall feel the chains of the judgment-angel on his neck, and sink with all his allies into the fiery lake of his everlasting torment. Christianity is throughout one grand system of Divine exorcism, for the expulsion of Satan, and the opening of the blinded eyes, stopped ears, and sealed lips of those whom he has bereft of spiritual sight, hearing, and speech.

And as this miracle indicated the true nature of Christ's mission and appointments, it was at the same time a complete demonstration of his capacity and fitness for the work. It evidenced his superior dominion over spiritual powers, and his sublime authority over the princedoms and potencies of the unseen world. It proved his ability to reach and control evil in its deepest and most hidden seat. Mere men hardly knew of the world which he thus laid open, and in which he thus showed the same mastery which he had exhibited over physical nature. It was therefore a sensible epiphany of power, stretching over the realm of spiritual potencies, and rising higher than all the highest sources and agencies of evil. It was a showing forth of the very omnipotence of God himself. And it is impossible to conceive a more complete and conclusive demonstration of the truthfulness of all that Christ claimed, or of his ability to expel Satan, and to rid the world of the satanic dominion. And yet, it very differently affected different classes of witnesses.

1. There were some whom it greatly amazed. "It came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake, and the people wondered." These were the commoner class of persons who saw what was accomplished. And we here note, what is generally the fact, that the common sense of the common people is more just and trustworthy than the conclusions of zealots, leaders, and partyists. This is true both in matters of state, and in matters of religion. It was from this class that

Christ selected his original apostles. It is with this class that the Gospel has ever received its most hearty welcome, and truth its most secure entrenchments. Common people with common sense are the world's best jury in nearly every case submitted to human arbitrament. Certainly the best judgment in the matter before us came from them. The number may not have been large, and the majority may not have finally settled down in the way which their impressions indicated. But, at the time the miracle was wrought, and so long as the interference of opposing leaders was kept at bay, *the multitude* [*οἱ ὀχλοι*] "wondered" [*ἐθαυμασαν*], *were filled with admiring astonishment and adoring reverence.* They recognized something of the real significance of what had been done. They felt that here was an exercise of the great power of God. And many doubtless gave devout thanks to the Lord of heaven and earth for sending such a messenger among men, and that he was ready and able to do such marvellous things for poor suffering humanity. According to Matthew, the inquiry went round, "Is not this the Son of David?" Is not this the very Messiah for whom Israel was to look and pray? Indeed, the matter admitted of no other just explanation. And whatever construction the bigoted and bitter scribes and Pharisees might put upon it, conviction at once took root in the common heart, that this was the Christ, and that God had come down in gracious visitation to his people.

God's truth is never fruitless Even among the

newsmongers and proud cavillers of Athens, one speech of Paul brought a Dionysius and a Damaris from paganism to the cross. And wherever there is an honest and unprejudiced heart, the evidences of Christianity are too plain to be mistaken, and too overwhelming to be withstood. The only reason why any one has difficulty with them, is, that he is unwilling to submit his heart to them, or has yielded to impulses or leaders antagonistic to the Gospel.

2. A second class of persons who witnessed this miracle consisted of certain rebellious spirits, who were ready to grasp at any absurdity, and to commit themselves to any sort of inconsistency and self-contradiction, rather than admit that Jesus was the Christ. Unable to deny or discredit the fact that a great and superhuman cure had been wrought, they set themselves to explain it so as to obviate the inference, that he who wrought it was from God. "Some of them said, He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the chief of the devils."

We notice here a great difference in their way of dealing with the matter from that adopted by modern unbelievers. Modern skeptics agree, that if miracles could be proven, they would necessitate the conclusion that Christianity is of God. The greatest masters of infidel logic have not been able to indicate how to avoid admitting the divinity of the Gospel, the miraculous works narrated in it being granted. In this they accord precisely with the Christian argument. Hence, to avoid the Christian conclusion, they deny that Christ ever

wrought supernatural works. But, unquestionably, these ancient infidels were the better judges of what they saw performed under their own eyes. The testimony of eye-witnesses must needs outweigh modern theorizing on the subject. If it had been possible for them successfully to discredit the facts, they certainly would have done it, rather than betake themselves to the feeble and absurd theory, that they were attributable to the devil. Taking them therefore as the most competent judges of the facts, and our modern infidels as the best judges of the logic of the case, between the two, we have, even from the bitterest enemies of Christianity, everything we need to settle unmistakably the Messiahship of Jesus, and the divinity of his religion.

The wilfulness and absurdity of ascribing Christ's miraculous power to the prince of demons is specially exposed by the Saviour. When we are unrighteously aspersed, we have a right to defend ourselves, and to show up the malignity and inconsistency of our enemies, that the truth may not be blasphemed.

It is one of the most familiar principles, that no kingdom or establishment can hold without some centre of common interest and concord. "Two cannot walk together except they be agreed." And so uniform is this law, that not even the confederation of hell can exist without it. "If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and how shall his kingdom stand?" House precipitated against house is simply ruin. If it has come

to this, that Satan has sent out an agent against himself, to overturn his own dominion, and to break his own empire; then is he undone, and his power is a myth. If he has a kingdom at all, such a thing would be the height of absurdity. If he is such a piece of insane madness, he has not the power to send such a messenger; and if he has sent such a messenger, it is impossible that he should be the master of the subtle dominion ascribed to him. There was therefore no sense, no logical coherence, between the facts which these malignant cavillers admitted, and the philosophy with which they attempted to explain them.

Besides, these people had a received and well-established article of faith touching the casting out of demons. The same had been done by people of their own class; in which case they had no scruple in accepting it as an exercise of Divine power. They had also associated the performance of the highest of such miracles with the introduction of the Messianic kingdom, and noted it as one of the forms in which the glory of that kingdom was to be evinced, and its divinity manifested. It was therefore a stultification of an item of their settled creed, and a most inconsistent suppression of their own avowed principles, now to ascribe the most remarkable of such dispossessions to the agency of the devil. Hence the Saviour's appeal, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges." Condemning him as in league with Satan, they condemned themselves, and gave the

lie to the very claims on which they most rested for their own sanctity.

The true nature of the case is parabolically given. Satan is like unto a strong man, armed, and entrenched in the world, and in the hearts of men, as in a palace, where he is ever on guard, and watching to keep his possessions free from disturbance or invasion. The loss of that palace, or those goods, or that armor in which he trusts, or the spoiling of any portion of those possessions, or any limitation of his power over them, must therefore be referred to the coming upon him of some one stronger than he, whose superior power he is unable to withstand. He had taken possession of these demoniacs as his particular property. He had laid hold on them as his special hostages and goods. With the strong arm, as of a military power, he held them. And now that it was seen, and could not be denied, that these prisoners were released—that the chains of their captivity were broken—that all the disabilities which he had fastened upon them were completely lifted off,—what was it? what less could it argue? than the advent of a power mightier than Satan, and the exercise of the omnipotence of God himself? It was a case so plain, a conclusion so obvious, that only the most wilfully blind and perverse could for a moment fail to accept it. But such is the wickedness and depravity of the human heart, that men will set aside common sense, quash every principle of reason, and even suppress and override the very arguments and conclusions underlying

their most solemn pretensions, rather than give to Christ his due, and submit to him as their Lord. The blessed Saviour brings his kingdom near them; he shows them the finger of God in the most potent and merciful administrations all around them; he appeals to them by the highest and most convincing of arguments; and yet some have the hardihood to set it all at nought, even though it should require the ascription of his miracles to the devil!

3. There was a third class, however, who assumed an attitude of feigned modesty in the case, who were scarcely less reprehensible. They would not say whether the miracle was of God or of the devil, but assumed to be earnest inquirers, quite ready to believe if only the Saviour would show them some "sign from heaven." It was not that they were so anxious to have honest doubts removed, or that they really desired to be convinced. It was only another form of the same spirit which ascribed the miracle before them to Satanic influence. There was no real lack of conclusiveness to their minds in the wonder which had just been wrought. They saw it, and felt its force quite as much as any others; but this was their strategy to meet its powerful logic, and to escape the conclusion which it embodied. They were willing to be convinced, O yes, but they could not take this miracle to be just as satisfactory as they desired. If Christ would gratify them, and make a new sun in the sky, or another moon, or some fresh star, or some unprecedented conjunctions or displays

among the heavenly bodies, they would be most happy to believe. Very prudent, wise, and modest people! too reserved and cautious to venture a whit further than to instruct God how to make believers, and to play off Christ among the stars as a juggling dancer to their will!

And very good and commendable did they evidently consider themselves in the attitude which they thus assumed. To them it was quite extreme and harsh to ascribe Christ's miracles to the devil. They would not be guilty of such daring opposition, or commit themselves to such ultraism. No, no; they would be moderate and reasonable in their course. True, they could not yet regard the question as sufficiently cleared up for decided action. Things were a little too inchoate and indistinct as yet. They wished to have them freer from embarrassment and objection before they moved. A great deal of bitter feeling and controversy existed, and they did not wish to be prematurely mixed up with it. They would therefore hold their decision in suspense, and wait for further developments, meanwhile siding a little with both parties, consenting with the worst, yet keeping up a fair show in favor of Christ and the truth.

But the Lord knew their thoughts, tore off the painted mask, and gave them to understand exactly where their pretended neutrality placed them. "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Neutrality and hesitation at some times,

and on some questions, might be wisdom and piety; but, in such a case as this, delay was opposition, and suspense was positive guilt, let the plea for it be what it might.

The justice of this sentence is manifest. The evidence before these people was ample. It convinced and decided the multitude, and it would convince any one candid enough to weigh and consider it as it deserved. The motive which induced hesitation was unsound and selfish. The object was to cover a hidden dissatisfaction and want of sympathy with the Saviour, and yet make the impression that they were devoutly anxious to accept him if they could only be made to see their way clear. The conditions on which they proposed to believe were also impertinent, presumptuous, and unreasonable.

Enough had been given; and it was not for them to dictate terms to the Almighty, or to expect him to come down to answer demands which they had no right to make, and which they really made only as a pretext for setting the whole thing aside. Depend upon it, there is treachery somewhere, when people come to you with favorable professions, and yet excuse themselves with "*ifs*" and preambulatory conditions. Though their words be full of good feeling and friendliness, their hearts have no sympathy with you. And the practical effect of the attitude of these pious neutrals was the same as the outspoken opposition which pronounced the Saviour a son of Belial. Both deprived Christ of his just due. Both set

aside the demonstration of Divinity which he had given them, and did away with its proper logical weight. And both placed their authors, not among his disciples, but among those who believed not on him. Nay, if there was any difference in the practical influences of the two positions, that of these fair-promising waiters for more light was the worst; for it had about it the lure and guise of honesty and friendship and yet as completely kept back from obedience as if it had been the most malignantly inimical.

Friends and brethren, let us not deceive ourselves. Neutrality on religious and moral questions may seem to be wise, modest, and fair; but it is not recognized of God. Its good-seeming outside is mere deceit and hypocrisy. We must be on one side or the other. And the word of Jesus is, "He that is not with me is against me." Willingness to go with him only when our terms are met, is nothing less than to go with those who denounce him as a messenger of hell. Though the devil may not seem so big in those who come with their pious professions, "the unclean spirit" has only gone out for a season. This sweeping and garnishing is but an invitation for his return. It is still *his* house, and he will presently come back to it with "seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." And so it turned out with these very people.

4. But there was yet another class represented among the witnesses of this miracle. "As he

spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." She spake as a mother, and she spake well and truly. Her feeling toward Christ was of a very different sort from that which so basely aspersed him, or so hypocritically put him aside under cover of pious friendship. She had seen the miracle, and was moved with reverence and admiration by it. She had heard the malignant interpretation of the blasphemers, and rejoiced at Christ's calm and conclusive exposure of its absurdity. And by the united attraction of his works and words, she was drawn into deep sympathy with him, and filled with exultation at his greatness and excellence. How happy the mother who had such a son!—so gracious, so powerful, so wise, so upright!—whom good men so honored, whom poor sufferers had so much cause to thank, on whom so many eyes were turned, and from whom so much was to be hoped! She was one who knew how the happiness of parents is bound up with their children. Perhaps herself unhappy in her sons, she was overwhelmed with emotion at the blessedness of that mother who could point to Jesus as her child. And great indeed was the honor and happiness of Mary, selected as she was from among the millions of her sex to be the mother of our Lord. Many a Hebrew woman had coveted her place. Though mixed with many painful circumstances, it was a position which any woman might exult to occupy

Even Gabriel saluted her as "highly favored" and "blessed among women," on account of it; and all the ages since have re-echoed his words, as she herself also foretold. Yea, blessed the woman who can contemplate the goodness, and greatness, and glorious achievements, and sublime honors of Jesus, and say, Behold, this is my Son!

But, there is yet a higher blessedness, open to all to whom the Gospel is sent, and on account of which this exclamation seems to have been introduced into the record. The Saviour admitted that it was even as she had said; but added an amendment, introducing a subject of superior gladness, and one for more general exultation. Blessed was Mary in her motherhood, and well for those who perceive and appreciate that maternity; but more "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

Quite too fleshly and sentimental were this woman's thoughts and emotions. Though well enough as far as they went, they did not penetrate to the true blessedness in Jesus, or to the right conditions on which its enjoyment rests. She did not rise to that evangelism which makes his truth in our hearts a far sublimer thing than to have our blood in his veins. The one is spiritual blessedness and eternal life; the other, of itself, is a mere outward distinction and carnal honor, whose enjoyment has no connection with forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul. One may have all the felicity of being the Saviour's earthly brother, sister, mother, and yet have no place in

the household of faith, or the family of the redeemed.

And it is just here that the religion of many falls short. They have great admiration for Christ, the excellence of his spirit, the beauty of his teachings, and the beneficence of his works. Nothing pleases them more than the pathos and eloquence of a spirited preacher. To enjoy the personal acquaintance of the man on whose words crowds hang with such delight—to be the mother, brother, sister of one so good and so distinguished—to belong to a church with such a famous history, such a magnificent ritual, and such a host of magnificent divines,—this strikes them with intense impressiveness. And the whole design, spirit, mission, and attributes of the Gospel they think so beautiful, and such a monument of praise to its author, that they are happy to speak out their joyous emotion at the contemplation. And it is well as far as it goes; but it is not religion. It is a mere earthly sentimentalism which fails of any saving effect. All the glories of Christ, and his works, and his Gospel, and his ministers, however much appreciated or admired, fail in their purpose, except as they lead us to credit and treasure the Word of God, and to submit ourselves humbly thereto. Exultation over the happiness of Christ's mother, and sentimental ecstasies over the beauties of Christianity, or the charms of its rites, and servants, and services, are not what Christ wants, or our souls need. It is good to have a vivid appreciation of these things; but there is something

far better, and without which all such glad emotions must pass for nought. Our great business is to delight ourselves, not with the honors of Christ's mother, but with the hearing, keeping, and doing of Christ's words. It is not gaping admiration, but practical obedience—not worldly ecstasy, but personal faith and earnest devotion to the Divine will,—that God requires and the Saviour praises. This can make us happier than the fleshly honor of being the Saviour's mother, or all the pleasantnesses of mere outward relations to the Gospel or its servants. Even Mary herself has more depending on her faith in Christ, and her union with him in common with all other believers, than on the ties of his maternity. The object of the Saviour's remark was therefore to lead us away from a mere sensuous, tangible, material, sentimental Christianity, to learn that those alone are truly blessed who are diligent in hearing the Word of God, who treasure it in their hearts, and who place all their trust and hope in it. These are they who build their house upon the rock; and theirs alone is the Christianity that shall stand in the day of trial.

From this subject, then, let us learn the true glory and office of Jesus. He comes to us as verily the messenger and Christ of God. He comes to us with the great power of the heavens. In him the potencies of the eternal kingdom are brought near to us. And it is all for our liberation from the thraldom and disabilities which Satan has inflicted upon us. He comes to us to open our

blind eyes; to unstop our deaf ears; to loose our tied tongues; and to set us free. He comes to cast out of us the unclean and disabling spirit which has long had possession of us, and to induct us into the blessedness of eternal life and heavenly glory. And it is with this grace and for this end that he is presented to each of us again this day. A more exalted thing and a higher honor than to be his mother, he this moment offers to every one of us. And shall we not wonder at the marvellous mercy which God hath bestowed upon us? Shall we not be moved with devout amazement at the almighty goodness of which we are the unworthy recipients? Shall we not join with apostles and saints in adoration of the manner of love which the Father hath bestowed upon us? Brethren, let us not be insensible to the fact, that not even the best of us have yet learned to comprehend a moiety of the mercies which we so freely enjoy in the Gospel of Christ.

From this subject let us also be admonished of the dangers that beset us of making our high privileges of none effect. The sublimest demonstrations of Christ's power and grace were the occasion of the deeper damnation to the scribes and Pharisees; and we have in us the same sort of depraved hearts which they had. They reasoned and moved according to their prejudices and carnal wishes, and thus missed their salvation; and we are in like danger of a like mistake. We must meet the Gospel with honest hearts. We must deal with it fairly and justly, or it will be no

blessing to us. Nor will it do to keep ourselves in a condition of suspense and indecision with reference to it. If we do not take sides, so as to submit to it with a prompt and positive obedience, the word of Jesus is, that we are none of his. Nor let us be deluded by our sentimental ecstasy. Mere rejoicing in the glory of Christ, without practical obedience to the word of Christ, does not come up to the standard of eternal blessedness.

And, above all, let us learn from this subject what our great duty under the Gospel is. It is not given by mere inference, but in plain and positive words, by the Saviour himself. It is, to "*hear the Word of God, and keep it;*"—not only to *hear it*, to give to it an earnest and honest attention, but also to *keep it*, to keep it in our hearts as the ground of our hope, and in our lives as the rule of our conduct.

Friends and brethren, have you met this requirement? Are you prepared to meet it now? Are you ready at this present to do what God's word unmistakably commands, and to settle your mind to it this day? The word of the Lord to each of us is, "My son, give me thy heart." Are you ready to comply with that demand? Do you ask, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" The answer of Jesus is, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." John 6: 28, 29. Are you willing then to do that work, and henceforward to commit yourself fully to the Saviour as his willing and

trusting disciple? The word of the Master is, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father and his holy angels." Luke 12:8. Are you then willing to confess him? His command by Peter is, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins." Acts 3:38. Are you willing then to obey him in this, that you may have a part in the glorious times of refreshing that are soon to come? He has appointed his holy sacrament, and given directions to his followers, "Do this, eat of this bread and drink of this cup," showing forth the Lord's death till he come. 1 Cor. 11:23–26. Are you made up then to attend to this his last command? These are things included in the hearing and keeping of God's word, and means to that blessedness which can no otherwise be obtained. For so it is written: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22:14.

Thus may I serve Thee, gracious Lord!
Thus ever Thine alone,
My soul and body given to Thee,
The purchase Thou hast won:
Through evil or through good report
Still keeping by Thy side,
By life or death, in this poor flesh
Let Christ be magnified!

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

JOHN 6 : 1–15 **After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.**

And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

FULL of instruction, wonder, and encouragement is this day's Gospel. It presents again the great duty of man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to find his chief business in higher things than those which relate to what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall secure the most of this world's comforts. It recommends to us by

facts, what the Saviour previously commanded in words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6 : 33.)

I. *We have here a picture of hopeful promise in the multitude.*

They were powerfully drawn toward Christ. They were looking for the Messiah, and for the manifestation of his blessed Kingdom. They had seen and experienced the miraculous power of Jesus. They had heard his truthful and impressive addresses. They were persuaded that they were in the presence of a most extraordinary personage. If they did not yet exactly believe, they largely suspicioned that he was the Christ. They were, at any rate, so impressed that they forgot everything else in their desire to hear and see more of him. Many were laboring under very erroneous ideas. All, perhaps, were more or less confused and chaotic in their notions. And some certainly were influenced more by a mere gaping wonder than by a really spiritual desire. But, in one way or another, there was a general and remarkable enthusiasm to hear and see more of him who did such marvellous things, and who was likely to tell them something satisfactory about the Christ, if not himself that Christ. He crossed the sea; but they hurried around it, to meet him on the opposite shore. He retired into the wilderness; but they went after him, and sought him out. He seemed to covet repose and quiet; but

they would give him no rest. Men, women, and children crowded to him, to see and hear him, and to witness his wonderful works. All provision for bodily wants, all concern for food and shelter, was quite displaced and forgotten in the one great controlling passion to be near him, if, peradventure, he might be the expected King and Redeemer of Israel.

However imperfect and confused the motives which induced this zeal, and however shortsighted in the eyes of worldly wisdom, Jesus honored it. It had him for its centre and object. It was, in some sort at least, a seeking of the Kingdom of God rather than earthly convenience and comfort. It was founded on a persuasion that they had in this man abundant to repay for all that they might suffer in thus following him. It also evinced a confidence and hopefulness in him which he never disappoints. He therefore added of his own free bounty what they had not sought,—earthly bread thrown in by way of extra measure, beyond the higher bread for which their hearts were longing.

Christ always favors them that honor him. Those who seek unto him as the King of grace, he feeds royally. Yea, and rather than that those who follow him should suffer hurtful need, the grass or stones of the wilderness will be turned to bread for them, and a few loaves and fishes multiplied by Almighty power to suffice for many thousands. What he would not do for himself, when an hungered in the wilderness, he does for the humblest and feeblest of those who are in ear-

nest search of his Kingdom; and what the devil in all his subtlety could not induce him to perform, is instantly commanded by the needs of those who were ready to accept him as the Christ.

He had said that it is not by bread alone that we live; that men may be able to command food and drink in abundance, and yet miserably perish; that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." There is another and higher bread required, without which no earthly bread is blessed. That bread is the nutriment and sustenance found in the Word; the aliment which cometh from giving heed to the utterances and commands of the Lord. This can nourish and bless where earthly food is but dust and ashes, and at the same time command and add what bodily necessities require. These people were concerned about the things of the Kingdom, forgetful of bodily wants, and from that they lived, and were comforted, and strengthened, even in the wilderness, where no bread is.

At the time this miracle occurred, Jesus had just heard of Herod's murder of John the Baptist. That infidelity toward God's servant at the seat of worldly power, also had something to do with his retirement to the wilderness beyond the sea. Where grace is repelled or mistreated, from thence it withdraws. But it is wonderful to see how what is driven away by the intrusiveness, presumption, and impiety of the great, is called forth again by the confidence of the poor, and the zealous pursuit of those who hunger and thirst after the Kingdom

of God. Man's wickedness is a dreadful repellant and extinguisher of Christ's wonder-working grace. It hushes the Saviour's words, stops his gracious works, and drives him away into other shores. But where there is an earnest desire to hear him, and real seeking of the soul unto him, and needy confidence pressing after him and looking to him, there Divine compassion rekindles, and Almighty power is drawn forth in new and mightier manifestations of mercy and goodness. So true is it, that, "though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off." Ps. 138 : 6. They that honor him are honored by him.

The effort and self-denial of this zealous multitude are greatly commendable. They had to make the circuit of the sea, which involved a journey of some twelve or fifteen miles. It was an adventure into a desert region, too remote from the neighboring villages to hope to find provisions for the day or shelter for the night, and too hurried to make preparations for either. The movement of the Saviour was one which seemed to indicate that he was for the time about to quit work, and withdraw into seclusion from public view. To the eye of mere earthly calculation, there was everything to discourage pursuit. But the heart moves by a higher impulse than this world's logic. Real interest in the things of the kingdom of God is not deterred by outward discouragements. True faith would rather faint in the pursuit of the Saviour, or perish with him in the wilderness.

than make itself easy with the profane, or glad at the bloody banquet of Herod.

The way to Christ is never smooth. Hindrances and fleshly dissuasions rise up at every step. The circuit of the sea must be made; the privations of the desert must be faced; the suggestions of unbelief and carnal reason must be overcome; and earnest labor must be performed. But sincere devotion follows him through all the roughness, against all dissuasions, and in the face of all trials and exposure. And in these things of salvation, above all, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." Ecc. 11 : 4.

II. *We have here a picture of faulty faith in the disciples.*

It is one of the common weaknesses, even of good Christian people, that their attention is often disturbingly occupied with human necessities, when they might rest in peaceful confidence in Christ's readiness to see to their supply. Such was the case before us. Philip surveyed the vastness of that hungry multitude, far from the reach of earthly help, and wondered whence the means should come to feed them. The Saviour had intimated that they were not to be sent empty away; but the trouble was, to see how it was possible to satisfy them. Reason turned over the problem, but could discover no solution. Two hundred pennies were counted as the extent of what the treasury contained, but the full worth of them

would not be enough to allow to each "a little," and even that could not be bought! Search was made through the crowd, but only "five barley loaves and two small fishes" could be found. What were they among such a multitude? The calculation was accurately made. The disciples reasoned it out to a demonstration, that such a company could not be fed with such a mite. They therefore gave it up in despair, and besought the Lord to send away the people at once, as the best thing they could devise.

O men of little faith! overwhelmed with impossibilities, when the very Lord of all Providence was standing by their side! According to earthly reason, Philip and Andrew were right. In the common course of affairs the thing was impossible. Nor could any one, except by the light and power of faith, have thought otherwise. But they had been long enough with Christ to know him better than to be driven to such helpless conclusions. They could reckon closely and confidently on the side of want; why not also on the side of supply? They professed to regard Jesus as the very Christ of God. They had seen much of his goodness and power. They had intimations from him that the multitude should there be fed; and they ought to have been able to come to more hopeful conclusions. But they did not yet believe and see what a Lord and Master they had. Otherwise Philip would have framed a very different speech and said, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them

may take a little; but, all praise to God, we have thee with us, and by thy blessing and help, even without a farthing, and far from the abodes of men, we shall have bread enough: for thou hast power and wisdom to draw from resources which other men know not of." Andrew also would have come with another finish to his story, saying, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, which are, indeed, scarce enough for ten; but if thou wilt take them, in thy hands they shall become enough and to spare for as many thousands." Such would have been the language of faith, triumphing over all the calculations or misgivings of mere earthly reasoning.

They did, indeed, believe, but their faith was overborne by looking only at human helplessness instead of the vastness of Divine resources. They had faith, but it failed them when sight and reason failed. True trust in God finds its sorest trials in worldliness. It suffers from mammon on the one side, and from poverty on the other. The rich man, filled with the goods of this world, casts God's word to the winds, or tramples it under foot, because he has plenty and feels independent. Herod cuts off the head of John without ceremony, and goes on with his feast as if nothing had occurred. And the poor man puts away the fear of God from before his eyes, lends himself to every device by which the devil promises him a better fortune, and makes himself easy over his faithlessness, lies, pilferings, and tricks, because he is poor,

and needs it. The one disregards Providence because he has plenty, and the other grumbles at Providence and undertakes to make one of his own, because he can see no other way. True faith sees everything in God and God in everything. What it receives it accepts as from him, and what it lacks it refers to him to supply. It matters not that it cannot see where its next meal is to come from. Though there be five thousand hungry mouths to feed, and only five loaves and two small fishes towards it; so long as it has Christ and his promise with it, it fears not, and finds no cause for despair or uneasiness. And this is what Christ would teach in the lesson before us. He would have us see in him the power from whom cometh all supplies. Who is it, indeed, that causes the naked trees of winter to bud and bloom in springtime, and to rejoice in their summer foliage and autumn fruits? Who is it that clothes the glebe with waving harvests, and fills men's barns and stores with bread? And is it less to bless the world with the annual wonders by which all creation is fed, than to give his trusting and obedient people their daily bread? "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Matt. 6: 26. And when we have the very Lord of nature with us, do we not dishonor him as well as ourselves by giving place to disheartening perplexity and despair over our little bodily wants? He knows our necessities and our

resources quite as well as we can calculate them; and he has plenty at command to supply every lack. Let the emergency be what it may, he is acquainted with it before it comes, and his blessed foresight has every provision made with reference to it. All that we have to see to is that we believe in him, that we keep close to him, that we trust confidingly in him.

He who the rule to God hath yielded,
And evermore on him relies,
Will be in wondrous manner shielded
In straits and all adversities;
Who in the highest makes his stand,
Builds not his hope upon the sand.

What are our heavy cares availing,
Why should we sigh our years away
What profit is there in bewailing
Our lot with each returning day?
Such sorrow lends a sting to care,
And gives a heavier cross to bear.

Rest thou in God amid all changes,
Be pleased with all he may ordain;
Wait patient till what he arranges
For thy best welfare shall be plain:
God, who hath chosen us as his,
Knows best what our true welfare is.

He knows, if need be, how to measure
The hours of sunshine as of shade;
And when we wait on his good pleasure;
With heart sincere and spirit stayed,
He comes more quickly than we know,
And makes our cup to overflow.

Think not when sorrow sharply trieth,
That God hath left thee desolate;
That some one in his bosom lieth
Who may be prosperous and great.
The days to come bring changes on,
And that which seems is quickly gone.

To him whose arm sways wide creation,
It is a light thing at his will,
To bring the great to lowly station,
And make the lowly greater still;
'Tis he whose wondrous ways we know,
Who lifteth up and layeth low.

Sing, pray, and onward still be pressing,
To thine appointed work be true;
Trust him and tarry for his blessing,
And it shall every day be new:
Whoe'er on God his hope hath cast,
Will find him faithful to the last.

III. *We have here a picture of wonderful goodness in the blessed Christ.*

It is perhaps the greatest of all his miracles. It has the pre-eminence over every other, in being mentioned by all four of the evangelists. It had to do with more people, for whose immediate benefit it was wrought, than any other of which we have an account. And it was itself a great and inscrutable wonder. Look at it for a moment.

"And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and

likewise of the fishes as much as they would." "And they did all eat, and were filled." Matt. 14 : 20.

This has been compared to a like miracle wrought by Elisha in the ancient times. 2 Kings 4 : 42–44. The resemblance is indeed close.

But the miracle of Elisha was weak and feeble by the side of this. Elisha had twenty loaves, and seemingly as many ears of corn, to a hundred men; Christ had only five loaves and two small fishes to five thousand men, beside women and children. And yet he had much more left than Elisha. We see at once that the one was the work of a servant, who wrought only in the measure of a servant; and that the other was the work of the Lord and Master, who wrought with infinite power, according to the majesty of his own will.

We observe also the truly Messianic character of this miracle. It is the office and prerogative of God, in the absoluteness of his Godhead, to create what is, from what is not. But redemption is a different process. It is a new creation, and an adding to the world what it does not possess by nature; but it is not a creation out of nothing. It is the taking of that which is, and a development in, with and from that, of something additional. It is the making of a new man out of the old—the making of a saint from a sinner—the evolution of a heavenly citizenship in an earthly subject. It is the office of the Christ to take existing material, with all its weaknesses and deficiencies, and so to exercise his divine power and

grace upon it, as to produce the intended improvement and blessedness. Hence his miracles, wrought in his capacity as the Saviour, all have this particular impress of his messiahship. His person was constituted after the same manner. It took hold of the existing humanity, and joined to it a new letting forth of Deity, to give to it a higher excellence and life. This is the whole sum of redemption. And as his miracles are the signs, pledges, and symptoms of the new creation, they all conform to this fundamental feature of the work of which they are the earnest.

The nature of the redeeming process is mysterious. It is of a sort which we cannot penetrate with our understanding, or follow with our senses. How God was incarnated, conjoined with humanity, born into the world, and reared, nourished, afflicted, and put to death, as a man, we cannot comprehend. It is a secret—a mystery. So also the operations of the Spirit in the impartation of his life to men. As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and no one can tell whence it starts, or whither it goes, "so is every one that is born of the Spirit." How the heavenly aliment, by which our souls are nurtured, is united with and conveyed by the means of grace, is beyond our comprehension. The same is true of the miracles, especially the one before us. It is impossible to realize, or to bring within the reach of our understanding, how these loaves and fishes were so marvellously multiplied. Some have seen in it only the shortening of the ordinary process of

nature. It has been spoken of as a mere miraculous hastening of what is continually going on in every wheatfield and in every river. That would indeed be wonderful enough, and presents a very beautiful and suggestive conception; but it does not reach the character of this miracle. What he gave the people, was not grains of barley as they come from the field, nor fishes as they come out of the water; but barley grains ground, kneaded, and baked in loaves, and fishes cleansed, cooked, and in the form in which they come to the table. It was not in a natural, but in an elaborated artificial state, that what was eaten was imparted. The barley came in baked loaves, and the fishes came already prepared as nature does not prepare them. How they came, even the closest observer could not tell. Just as one was taken, another was in hand, and another, and another, and another, until the whole immense multitude was served, and filled, and twelve baskets full remained! It was just such a wonder as no philosophy could explain, no eye follow, and no understanding comprehend, a veritable putting forth of almighty power, as inscrutable as the creation work, when "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

And it was as gracious as it was inscrutable. Christ might have shown his almightiness in works of judgment and terror; but he made them all works of mercy, kindness, and gentle ministration to the wants of the suffering and needy. And such was the spirit of the wonderful transaction before

as. Seeing the people, he "was moved with compassion toward them." He pitied them in the spiritual distress under which they thronged to him; and he was not unmoved toward their bodily necessities, which the great mass of them would have sorely felt had he not thus interfered for their relief. He therefore set himself to help them both temporally and spiritually by one and the same transaction, showing them his almightiness in his goodness, and verifying his blessed messiahship in a miracle as merciful as it was wonderful.

IV. Finally, *we have here materials of happy encouragement and promise to faith and obedience.*

Gloriously does this miracle proclaim the messiahship of our Lord. It was not only the exhibition of an unprecedented power which could come from none but God; but it was the exhibition of it in a line which identified him as that prophet foretold by Moses, like unto him. Deut. 18: 15. The greatest wonder wrought under Moses, was the feeding of the people with bread direct from God; and it was held a mark of the Christ, that he should, in some sort, repeat the Mosaic miracles. Here then was the predicted token. The people saw it, and were sure that their long-expected Messiah had come. They could not be mistaken. And so strong was the fervor of their conviction, that they determined to take him, whether or no, and crown him as their king. Their proposal was full of error, but the conclusion which prompted it was not to be disputed. He

had amply proven himself to be the Christ. Nor can we err in so receiving him, and trusting in him. This miracle is one of our imperishable guarantees that he is the Christ of God.

And with his messiahship it also proclaims what he proposes to be to us—the gracious source and administrator of food to the hungry and perishing—the giver of life and salvation to the faint and starving—the very bread of heaven to our needy souls. It preached in miraculous deed, what he afterward embodied in the words: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John 6 : 51. Earth is a wilderness. Our estate in it is one of hunger and faintness. Nothing that man can furnish can relieve us even "a little." But Christ has crossed over to our shores. He is our help and strength.

> True bread of life, in pitying mercy given,
> Long-famished souls to strengthen and to feed.

Nay more; even our poor earthly loaves and fishes, if brought to him, shall have their ban removed, and expand with new blessedness, and become the hallowed sacrament of a heavenly impartation. He is here to bless our earthly bread, to consecrate the commonest things of our life, and to make even the wilderness of this world glad with his gracious benedictions.

We may sometimes feel uneasy as the night

draws on, and faintness is upon our hearts, and weakness in our limbs. But this subject teaches us not to fear. If we have betaken ourselves to Jesus, he has already considered our case, and his precious grace shall be sufficient for us. As Paul said to the Philippians, so this miracle certifies to all earnest attendants upon the Lord: "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." 4: 19. The manna which God gave under Moses, came only for one day at a time. What fell to-day could not be carried over into the morrow. But when the evening of the week drew on, there was a double portion. And as the day of life draws to its close, then it is that his gracious bounty flows the freest. Only "trust in the Lord, and do good; and verily thou shalt be fed." Ps. 37: 3.

Men and brethren, let me assure you of this one thing. "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. Man knoweth not the price thereof." Of old it was called the way of wisdom, and the way of blessed understanding. It is the way that leads to Jesus, to listen to his word; and to the Christ, to trust in his almighty goodness. Have you trodden that way? Have you found that Saviour? Have you learned to turn your back upon the gay and banqueting world to go after him? Have you learned to see in him the messenger of God and the spring of everlasting life? Have you learned to let go all worldly hopes

for this bread of life? Have you learned to humble yourself, and to sit down at his feet, awaiting the movement of his gracious power, and making your meat and your drink of what he giveth you? O the blessedness of your privileges! O the preciousness of your opportunities! How would the lost in Hades leap with joy to hear what you hear, and to enjoy what you enjoy! A free salvation offered without money and without price! The Bread of eternal life carried to you by apostles of Jesus, and put in glorious plenty in your hands! "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Rom. 12:1. Grace calls you again to-day. Redemption's gates are wide open to receive you. The annual period has come when the Church makes her special appeal to every one to come, and sit down with Jesus, and take what he giveth. And his wish and invitations to all are, that they turn aside from the gay and murderous world to him, who has come not to destroy men's lives but to save them, and to minister to them the bread of heaven.

Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.

Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above;
Come to the feast prepared; come, ever knowing,
Earth has no sorrow but Heaven can remove.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

JOHN 8 : 46–59. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?

Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God. Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

Then took they up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

IN the order of the Church's arrangement of her lessons, the blessed Saviour is now beginning to draw near the last scenes of his humiliation. Each successive Sunday has added some new light to the wonderful picture. Manifold, also, are the rays which flash upon us from this morning's Gospel.

We here behold our Lord in his final disputation with his wicked adversaries. Shocked as we may be at the malignity, coarseness, blasphemy, and murderous hate manifested on their part, there is much that is gloriously encouraging to our faith in what is called forth from him against whom it was directed.

A sharper contest with men than that which is described in this chapter the Saviour never had. It was also fearfully disastrous to the parties who so determinedly withstood him. It was intended to bring them to a better mind and to minister salvation to them, but their perverseness transmuted it into an occasion of judgment, which still vibrates through all the earth.

It is a sad sight to see such great mercies turned into such fearful augmentations of guilt and condemnation, and to behold the spotless and only Son of God subjected to such resistance and indignities. Nevertheless, the picture is full of blessed revelations and precious lessons, for which we may well be thankful. It is astonishing how much we are indebted to the sins and wickednesses of men for some of the sublimest manifestations of the Divine goodness and glory. Sin and depravity are dreadful things; but if it had not been for sin, we should have had no Christ, and none of those touching displays of Godhead and grace which are peculiar to the plan of redemption. In the economy of God, everything that occurs is overruled for good in the end. And but for the malignity and hardihood with which the Saviour was re-

sisted and withstood by his foes, many an important item of Christian knowledge would have failed in that perfection and impressiveness of expression which it has received. The Psalmist sung: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain," Ps. 76:10; and the fearful contest before us is an illustration of his words. It compelled the opposers of Jesus to an assertion of the depravity which was in them, and to a demonstration of the workings of an unbelieving heart, full of instruction and warning to us; and it served at the same time to uncover treasures of truth, goodness, and glory in Christ, which call for our everlasting admiration. We may therefore consider this text:

I. As it Relates to the Character, Office, and Work of Christ.
II. As it Relates to the Depravity, Guilt, and Danger of Man.

1. The blessed Saviour had come to these people as a messenger from God. He had spoken to them the mind and will of the Father as no one ever had done. He had addressed them with such wisdom as to compel the admission that, "Never man spake like this man," even with such mastery of truth as to beget the testimony that "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes;" and with such gravity and power that it was their common wonder whence he could have obtained such learning. He also confirmed his

word with unprecedented miracles, and crowded his short ministry with more of them than ever were wrought before or since. He also sustained all his presentations by Moses and the Prophets, and brought tidings of a sort to command the ready and delighted attention of all men. They had been taught to look for a Messiah, who was the centre and hope of their national faith, and he came to them, as was predicted in their sacred books, with all the tokens and seals of his appointment to free them from oppression, to save them out of their sins, and to set up for them an everlasting kingdom of liberty and blessedness. And for three years and more he had gone to and fro among them, meekly proposing himself to them as the promised Fulfiller of their law and their prophets, to whom all their ceremonies pointed, and for whom all their holy fathers had looked and waited. All this he had most certainly done, as his enemies well knew, and also in many ways admitted. Indeed, this was the head and front of the offence which they charged against him, and on account of which they were so zealous to have him put out of the way.

2. He had lived before them a spotless life, both as to his walk and teachings. He had been born and reared among them, and from the time his public ministry began he was never out of their view. They had watched his whole career with the most rigid scrutiny, and tried him in public and private, openly and clandestinely. Their spies

were on his steps at every turn, and their eyes were ever open, longing for the presentation of something whereof they might accuse him. And now, at the conclusion of his course, he throws down to them the daring challenge: "*Which of you convinceth me of sin?*"

It was a bold appeal. No mere man would have been safe in venturing upon it. Had either of the saints propounded such an inquiry, it would not long have remained without an answer; nay, it would itself have been a sin. An Abraham, a Moses, a David, a Peter, a Paul, a John, would soon have sunk before such a test. Silenced at once were the boasted Pharisaic saints, and in confusion they skulked away, man by man, when Jesus "lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," whom they had arrested as an adultress. Nor has there ever been another, of woman born, that could dare to risk his cause upon such a test as this. What would Satan not have given at that moment to have had it in his power to answer the heavenly challenge? With what eagerness, too, would those children of his have rushed to accept it if they had had the smallest show of fastening any fault upon the Divine Hero. Yet, with an august humility which makes us tremble as we look, the Holy One of Israel submits himself for those malignants to convict him if they can! He throws down the challenge, and stands pausing in his sublimity for their response. But silence is upon them, like the silence of death! The

heart, the motive, the desire were not wanting to find him guilty, and to crush him if they could; but even malignity was dumb, and the treasuries of hatred were empty of the wherewith to accuse him. The inspired Apostle has written that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," Heb. 7:26; and even the bitter tongues of his persecutors and murderers were not able to gainsay it.

3. He came not, however, to seek his own glory, but to bring honor to the Father. It was not to show how pure he was, or how wise he was, or what wonders he could do, or what multitudes he could gather to his interests, or what distinction and praise he could win for himself among men, that he came into the world, or directed his way through it. Nor was it his own good, safety, ease, fortune, or comfort that he sought in his marvellous life. In every hour and deed of his whole career, he could say, as no other human being could say, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me," "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work," "I must work the works of him that sent me." John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:4. Never a self-prompted aim, or separate interest of his own diverted him for an instant from the saving will of the Father. When he came into the world, he came saying: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Heb. 10:9. Satan tried to raise in him another will when he assailed him in the wilderness, and

when he encompassed him with the agonies of the Garden; but in the one case as in the other, his holy soul would know no other interest than obedience and submission to him that sent him, ever crying, even from the brink of hell, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Matt. 26:42. And in whatever attitude, act, or surroundings we find him, "*I honor my Father*" is the key which unlocks its import; and "*I seek not mine own glory*" is true to the profoundest centre of his being.

Nor are we uninformed as to what was that peculiar will of the Father which so completely absorbed him. He himself hath declared it: "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." John 6:39. To save lost men, to recover them from their sins to heavenly affections and holiness of life, to work their deliverance from condemnation, death, and the devil, and to make them partakers in the blessedness of an eternal kingdom of righteousness; for this he was sent, and this he pursued with unvarying constancy through sufferings, shame, poverty, toils, and death. In joy or sorrow, in honor or disgrace, in life or in the sacrifice of it upon the cross, he would know nothing else, but gave himself up wholly to this only, with more undivided fervency than a starving man craves food, or a drowning man grasps the object that promises him deliverance.

4. And even while men revile and resist him, he offers to become their salvation. Because he would honor the Father, he meets enmity with goodness, and proposes eternal life to his malignant persecutors. In defiance of all provocation and opposing guiltiness, he stretches out the arms of his mercy, and breaks forth with the words of promise: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death.*"

Christ is the ever living Word, the spring and substance of undying blessedness. His sayings are the impartations of himself, the seed of divine and eternal life to the hearts of those who receive them. To the eyes of men, a Christian may die. His bodily vigor may be dissipated by disease or age, and he may disappear from among the dwellers upon earth. But to him, death is no more death. Its sting is gone with the taking away of his sins. He does not die under guilt, or as a penalty for crime. The miseries of an unforgiven man do not come upon him. Though he pass through the dark valley, he does not realize its horrors. They are all quenched and taken away from him, just as the consuming power of the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace were held back from harming the Hebrew youths whom they enveloped. The bonds of judgment being broken from off his conscience, and the truth and life of the undying Christ being rooted in his heart, he is in death and the grave without being overcome, and with abiding joy and hope of an eternity of blessedness beyond. Death proper, he

neither tastes nor sees. At worst, it is to him only a temporary accident, which shall presently be repaired, washed out, and forever forgotten in that kingdom of life and glory to which he belongs. As he whose face is to the sun sees nothing of the shadow that is behind him, so he whose soul receives Christ as his light never realizes the darkness of what men call dying. The hope, and life, and consolation, which a believer has in Jesus are as bright, and real, and potent, and unfailing to him in his passage out of the world, as in his stay in it. And by the life and power of these, he passes through death, as passengers in a rail-car, absorbed with some animating topic, pass the place they feared without discovering it till it is behind them. "*He shall never see death.*"

Our blessed Lord thus assumes to himself a glory of power even more startling and wonderful than his claim to sinlessness and perfect harmony with the Father's will. He here gives himself out as the Source of life. He is the Redeemer from death. There are no evils which he cannot make as though they were not, and no straits, however dark and terrible, through which his word, rightly planted in the soul, will not bring in safety and in peace. The grave itself is bereft of all its chilling horrors through the grace and power of his Gospel. The very gates of the under world give way to the soul that receives his sayings.

5. And to put to flight all doubt and misgivings on this point, he goes on to assert for himself an

essential oneness of nature with the Father. He had exalted himself above Abraham and the holy prophets. He had claimed as a fruit of the right reception of his words what might well startle every listener. What then did he make himself? The answer is, that he was the object of Abraham's holy joy and faith, and the substance of the glad hope of all that had ever lived or died in the Lord. Would men know his relative dignity as compared with the saints of the past? Let those saints, themselves, testify on the subject. Abraham rejoiced to see his day, and he saw it, and was glad. Was he too young a man to have been living in the time of Abraham? "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, *before Abraham was I am.*"

"I AM" is the name by which the Lord made himself known to Moses, and announced himself under the Old Testament. It was *Jehovah*, *Javeh*, this self-same I AM, that walked with our first parents in the Garden of Eden, communed with the patriarchs, delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, proclaimed the law from Mount Sinai, sent and inspired the prophets, and appeared in all the ancient theophanies. The Bible knows of no other God than he to whom this distinguishing name belongs. And that name Jesus here appropriates to himself. He says he is the I AM. If he, as a man, was but of yesterday, and could not have seen Abraham, the I AM was before Abraham, nay, was "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,"

who sent Moses to Pharaoh, and whom al. the holy prophets served. The Jews understood him to assert that he was that same divine I AM, and so he intended that he should be understood. As he elsewhere said, he and the Father are one. And though young in earthly years he was still Abraham's senior, Abraham's contemporary, and Abraham's God. Though humanly considered he was not yet fifty years old, he was that same eternal *Word* which was in the beginning with God, and which was God. Though conditioned by human life, and existing now in true human nature, there was in him what had always been, and ever should be. Whether we shall ever be able to fathom the awful mystery or not, there pulsated in that heart of his, and spoke in those words of his, the same almightiness which called the worlds into being. Not fifty years only, nor all created years only, but all the eternal years were his. It was God himself, manifested in the flesh, who there stood before the blaspheming Jews, offering to become their Saviour, and proposing by his word to secure them against all the powers of death and hell.

No, it is not a mere Abraham who comes to us with proposals of salvation. It is not a mere arm of flesh that is extended to help us out of our miseries. I AM hath come. It is the Ever Living One who engages to secure us against death. Nor is it too much to believe that the Fountain of Life can make good his word to them that keep his sayings.

Oh! it is a great and glorious Saviour who is presented to us in the Gospel. Angels themselves pause in their spheres to contemplate him, and the myriad myriads who populate the heavens shout and sing forever: "Worthy is the Lamb to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

So much for what we find in this text touching the character, office, and work of Christ. Let us now go back, and briefly consider it as it relates to the depravity, guilt, and danger of man.

1. We would naturally suppose that so glorious a Saviour, with the tokens of his Divine messiahship so clearly indicated, and with such transcendent blessings in his hands to bestow upon those to whom he came, would at once be hailed with delight, and that all would flock to his standard with eager joy to partake of his salvation. Such wisdom, such holiness, such condescension, and such almighty grace we would expect at once to win the acceptance and confidence of lost men. But it was not so. They would not believe him. A world of sad and sorry fact is expressed in that short appeal of his: "*Why do ye not believe me?*"

But, alas, it has been the same in all nations and ages. There has been no lack of the preaching of Christ as the true and only Lord and Saviour of men. The Gospel has gone abroad over all the earth. Salvation and eternal life are carried now to every one's door, and published in every one's hearing. But "who hath believed

our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" A few here and there believe, but the great mass go on in their sins and unbelief as if they needed no Saviour, and required not the services of Jesus. Heaven speaks, but they will *not* listen. The great I AM, that made them, comes to them by his word and ministers, and freely proposes to save them out of all their distresses and dangers; but they pass all by with sneering indifference or cold neglect. Where matters of worldly fortune and pleasure are concerned, they are quick-sighted, prompt, active, and easily persuaded. No confidence is lacking, and no want of willingness to experiment with all possible energy. But here they are dead, and everything is leaden, dull, and torpid. They do not believe.

2. Very unreasonable also were those who so conducted themselves towards the Saviour. There is an indissoluble logical connection between the moral character of Christ and the authenticity of his claims. If he was a good man he spoke the truth. No good man can lie and deceive, and at the same time be a good man. Either, then, Jesus was all that he said he was, and hence was to be credited, accepted, and obeyed; or, he was a deceiver, and not a good man. But when he challenged them to convict him of sin, they were compelled to unwilling silence. Like Pilate afterwards, they could find no fault in him. His whole life and doctrine were absolutely unimpeachable. With all their malice they could make out nothing

against him. They were forced against themselves to let his claim to sinlessness stand. And in that claim there was necessarily included the inevitable truth of his testimony concerning himself. If he was sinless he spoke the truth, and if he spoke the truth they were bound in reason and good morals to accept it.

There is nothing more binding than the truth. It is something which connects directly with God. The Almighty himself is truth. It is that sacred thing, the rightful dominion of which is inalienable and eternal. To make light of truth, or to disown obligation to it, is sin against the reality of things, and the profoundest crime that can be perpetrated. There is nothing good or blessed which is not founded upon the absolute sovereignty of the truth. Break that eternal ligament and you subvert the universe. If we are not bound by the truth, we have no right to live, to think, or anything else. And as Jesus was so sinless as to insure the truth of his testimony, it was the worst of all insaneness, and treason to the highest and most imperious necessity of things, not to believe him.

Rightfully, therefore, did the Saviour press the demand: "*If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*" There was no law or principle in being by which they could either justify or excuse themselves in treating his truth as if it were falsehood. The primary rocks of all rational and moral obligation had been reached. There was no reason, no logic, no just way of handling things, that could

more inevitably bind man than that by which they were shut up to the acknowledgment of Jesus as their Messiah. And yet they broke through it all, and would not believe him. Had they been the honest, reasonable, and God-fearing people they professed to be, such conduct would have been impossible. It was a demonstration that they had forsaken the kingdom of right reason, and the laws of eternal morality. It was an assertion of allegiance to principles foreign to all that God has ordained for the government of moral beings. It was an expatriation of themselves from the empire of truth, reason, and conscience, making evident what the Saviour said: "Ye are of your father, the devil." "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." And as he himself was sinless and true, there was no escape from the awful verdict but in prompt, penitent, and obedient submission to him as the Christ. O there is a reasonableness, a justness, a logic in the claims and proposals of the Gospel, from whose condemning power men struggle in vain to set themselves free without obeying them. People may think that they are acting rationally and justifiably in putting the Saviour from them; but they violate all the laws of intelligent thinking, and acknowledge sonship in the household and synagogue of the father of lies.

3. So unreasonable, therefore, was the unbelief of these people; but they made it worse still. Unable to answer the Saviour, they began to blas-

pheme him. They called him opprobrious names, and railed upon him as a heretic, an idolater, an accursed one, a man possessed of the devil, as if that would justify them. The vilest sinners are often the greatest accusers. Such is human nature that it will fight the light, and try to heap scandal on those who beneficently carry it to them. Foiled in argument, they resort to abuse, and try to make up by bad temper and denunciation what they lack in reason. Because the preacher tells them the truth, and deals faithfully with their souls, they hate him, and take pleasure in reviling him. Because he will not compromise with their impieties, they call him hard names, and persecute him. We give people reason and truth, and they mutter sneers and ugly resentments. We insist that they shall submit to what they can in no way refute; and they sullenly denounce us as Puritans, hypocrites, self-seekers, and apostles of devilish priestcraft. We hold up to them the fearful consequences of their unbelief, and they pick up stones to cast at us, and drive us from their company. Christ comes to them with all the imperishable treasures of his grace, and they cry, "Away with him," and crucify him.

It is the nature of sin to grow and multiply. When the mind once submits to it, there is no length of guilt in the whole catalogue of crime to which it does not stand committed, and which it may not readily reach. One wrong position will vitiate what otherwise would be right, and almost necessitates further and greater wrong. Such is

also the nature of the Gospel that if it does not soften and convince, so as to bring to repentance and faith, it inevitably hardens and destroys. Great mercies neglected or misused become the augmenters of guilt and condemnation. If Christ had not thus spoken to these Jews, their sin would have been less, and their judgment not so severe. Hence, they began with stifling the conclusions of right reason in order to gratify their prejudices and dislikes, and they ended with imbruing their hands in the blood of their proper King and Lord. They would not believe Christ lest it should damage their standing and their state, and they and their state miserably perished together. O it is a fearful thing to trifle with conscience and truth, and to be unfaithful to the claims of Jesus!

How is it then, my dear friends, with you? "for unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them." The word preached to them "did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it," Heb. 4:1, 2. Do you then believe? Alas, are there not many of whom the Saviour has thus far been forced to say: "Ye believe me not?" What shall I say to such? I have spoken and spoken, and exhausted myself with study, and argument, and expostulation, and entreaty, yet they hesitate, and object, and delay. They are my friends, and their personal kindnesses I value; but they are not the friends of my Lord, and until this hour decline to become his servants. Shall this state of things continue? Oh, ye neglecters of the Saviour who died for you, and of the redemp-

tion which he has provided for you, and of the mercy which this day makes to you another offer, how long would you yet have your Lord to wait? For what, indeed, are you waiting yourselves? What good ends are you accomplishing, what interests are you subserving, what are you adding to your comfort, peace, or hopes by your delay? You have been excusing yourselves; and yet, what is your excuse? You are not willing to throw up all interest in Christ, and yet you will not confess him as your Lord. You are comforting yourselves with Christian expectations, and yet you will not agree to become Christians. You are not without a degree of satisfaction in the Gospel, and take pleasure in listening to its ministers, and giving to its support; what, then, is it that keeps you back from closing in with all its higher blessedness? It is not your wish that judgment should find you as you are. You desire to die the death of the righteous. What, then, is the bewitching spell that withholds you from complete identification with the blessed Lord? Another week, and some will be going forward to this altar to confess Jesus, and to take his gracious yoke upon them; and I now ask you in the name of Christ, and before Almighty God, WILL YOU BE AMONG THEM? And your answer to that question is not to *me;* it is to your Maker—it is to him to whom you must look for all favors in the great day; it is to him whose pitying and wounded heart yearns over you, and asks: "*Why do ye not believe me?*"

SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

(PALM SUNDAY.)

MATT. 21 : 1–9. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them unto me.

And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

WE enter to-day upon a week of solemn and awful memories. It is the week which saw the Saviour's deepest agony and mysterious death. Our fathers called it "the great week"—great in what it saw accomplished, and great in the spiritual benefits and consolations which it is well fitted to bring to those who will properly improve it.

The Gospel for this morning presents us with an appropriate opening to it. We here behold the Saviour making his entry into the city which was about to reject and crucify him. But though ad

vancing to his execution, there gathers round him, as around the setting sun, a radiance and glow of mellowed light, which tells of unquenchable greatness, at the same time that it betokens approaching night.

For the first time in his life, he here assumes something of a royal and triumphal bearing. He appears, indeed, as a man, but he commands as a sovereign, rides as a king, and accepts the worshipful laudation of the multitude as the Son of God. No royal chariot bears him, and no grand conventional pageant marks the scene. He is content to ride upon one of the meanest of animals, and that a borrowed one; but he sent for it, and claimed to appropriate it to his use, as the Lord of all animals, and of their masters too. He speaks of need, as one of the poorest of mere mortals; but he speaks with a prescience which belongs only to Divine intelligence, telling where the colt was to be found, under what circumstances it was situated, what was its history, how willing its owner would be to let it go, and all the minute particulars of the case. He goes into the holy city as a common worshipper, and yet fulfils to all beholders the sublime words of the ancient prophet: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, even a colt the foal of an ass." He is on his way to a shameful death; and yet his path is strewed as that of a glorious hero. Hosannas greet him from before, and from behind; and Jerusalem thrills with awe at his approach.

There are many aspects in which we may view this scene.

I. It presents *an illustration of the relation of Christ to the religious feeling of mankind.* We are religious beings. Our very nature is framed with sensibilities for the sacred, the heavenly, and the Divine. There is something in us which cannot help being affected with what is superior and worshipful, and which, if left free, responds to the superhuman, as leaves move with the breeze. And the scene before us shows how it is affected by Christ.

1. He rouses it into activity. An enthusiastic shout here drops upon our ears. It fills the air, echoes from the hillsides, and resounds even to the gates of the Temple. Never, perhaps, was there another such a multitude so deeply moved. It was not mere patriotism, or earthly emotion. It was religious interest, earnest conviction, spiritual feeling. And the cause of it was Jesus. From him streamed all the power which awakened it. The hearts of these people saw in him the filling out of a picture, which touched their profoundest religious expectations, and roused all the sensibilities of their being. They saw in him a Prophet and Messenger of God. They recognized in him a superhuman glory. They beheld in him Israel's long-promised King and Redeemer. And all the energies of their nature answered with Hosannas to the image which he presented to their souls. Nor is there a human heart, unwarped by falsehood and prejudice, that can contemplate the

Christ without being moved with a like sacred emotion. All true moral sensibility stirs and turns toward him, when properly presented, as the needle stirs and turns to the magnet.

2. He inspires it with gladness. The shout of this multitude was not the mad shout of battle, but a shout of joy. It was a holy song of rejoicing. There is a moral awakening which has no joy in it. Nay, usually, the more the soul is made to see and feel of the presence and majesty of what is divine, the greater is its discomfort, uneasiness, and dread. There sometimes is a painful and almost unsupportable pressure going along with close converse with the powers of the unseen world. The natural man is afraid of God. But Jesus takes away these terrors, and makes the soul joyous, peaceful, and glad. A view of Sinai inspires only dismay; but a view of Christ puts Hosannas into heart and lips.

> Sweetly the name of Jesus sounds
> In a believer's ear,
> It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
> And drives away his fear.

3. He also encourages the expression of religious emotions and convictions. These joyous utterances, as Luke tells us, were very unpalatable to some. There were surly Pharisees who complained, and said, "Master, rebuke thy disciples." But "he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Luke 19:40. The

songs of Zion have no music for the wicked. There is something repulsive to the carnal heart in this ado about religion and the glory of Jesus. It has something in it which condemns the godless, rouses their consciences, and disturbs their peace. They would rather dispense with it, and have people keep their feelings to themselves. But Christ would have his disciples speak their adoring joys, and confess to the rapture in their hearts. He who has said, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands," is not offended with the loud echoing Hosannas of his people, but defends and blesses them in the glad utterances of their praises.

II. This narrative furnishes *an earnest of the Saviour's glorious Kinghood.* He is a King. He was born to reign. And the ultimate result of his ministrations will be, the establishment of a Kingdom over all kingdoms, and a dominion which shall endure forever. He reigns now by his truth and grace in the hearts of his people, in the ordinances of his Church, and in his providence over the world. "But we see not yet all things put under him." Heb. 2:8. Yet God hath ordained a time when "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:10, 11. The symptoms of this glorious consummation are visible in the scene before us.

1. We here see the world serving him. He

commands both men and beasts, and causes them all to obey his will, and serve his wishes. The disciples go whither he sends them. The stranger to whom they come gives up his property to the Lord, as to him who has the first and sovereign right to it. The untamed brute, upon which never man had ridden, obediently submits to bear him on his way. And the multitude behind, and the multitude before, vie with each other in doing him honor, and answer each other in glad and harmonious Hosannas to the Son of David and the promised King of Israel. Not by accident did all this happen. It was the divinely arranged prelude and precursor of that finished work of the Messiah, when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, and they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him—when all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him—when thousand thousands shall minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him—when "there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord," and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

2. We here see the whole multitude of his disciples filled with joyous exultation. All sorrows and griefs were for the hour quite swallowed up in the abounding blessedness. And this also was a prelibation of the bliss of his consummated dominion. Of old already it was written, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so

long as the moon endureth. . . . And men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." Ps. 72: 6–17. And then for the first time, in its full majesty, shall go up the song of joyful adoration, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things;" and from the hosts on high shall come back the thrilling response, "And blessed be his glorious name forever;" while creation vibrates through all its ransomed pulses, "Amen and Amen."

3. We here see the most unlikely prophecies touching his kinghood fulfilled to the very letter. Six hundred years before, Zechariah looked down the ages and said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, even a colt the foal of an ass." Who would or could have anticipated that this was to be literally true of the glorious Son of God, and Prince of Peace. Even with the plain words before him, who would ever have expected to see so sublime a Being, on so royal an errand, making his entry into the sacred city, seated on such a dull and unsightly beast? But exactly as the prophet said, the event transpired. We thus are furnished with a pledge for the literal fulfilment of all that the prophets have spoken of his kingdom and future reign.

It is one of the vices of the Church of our times, which leads her to seek to accommodate and confine the glowing predictions of the Scriptures on this subject to the present stage in the processes of redemption. People have much to premise

about poetic diction and oriental metaphor, when they approach the prophecies of God. They have much to say about a carnal and earthy drapery to be laid aside in order to get at the real meaning of what has been written for our learning and comfort. The facts of this morning's lesson scatter all such rationalizing to the winds. When God spoke by the prophets, he meant what he said, and said what he meant. And however extravagant, unlikely, or overwrought the sacred descriptions may appear, they tell of realities, which shall yet come to pass exactly as they have been written. And when it is said that our God shall come; that there shall be given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom; that all people, nations, and languages shall serve him; that the heathen shall be given him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; and that "the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously," and "over the house of Jacob forever;" the seal and pledge is here given us, by the King himself, that every jot and tittle of the holy record shall be fulfilled. Only let it be ascertained that *so it is written*, and so we may safely count that it shall be.

4. Further, we here see the sorrowful hopelessness of Christ's enemies, when he begins to let his royal majesty forth. We see it in the choice of the animal on which he rides. There were two asses brought to him, a colt and its dam. He rejected the older—the Jewish Church—which had

long been familiar with the yoke, and seated himself upon the untamed colt, on which no man had ridden; intimating that thenceforward the wild Gentiles were to be the bearers of his Church and the chief recipients of his favors. We see the same in his rebuke of the Pharisees, who desired to have the hosannas of his disciples hushed. We see it in the tears which started in his eyes as he beheld the city, and in the words of lamentation which he uttered over Jerusalem for not knowing the time of her visitation. We see it in the disturbing commotion awakened in the city, as he thus rode into it. And this too was a foreshadowing of how it shall be, when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the saint-angels with him,—when he shall distinguish between the nations and rebuke many people, and speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure, and break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Yea, so it is written, "The Lord shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." 2 Thess. 1:7–10. It is a sad announcement, but a true one, that the blessed Kinghood of Jesus has in it nothing but fearful disaster to those who believe not in him.

III. The text also suggests important ideas touching *Christ's perpetual coming to his Church.* He has a Church—a congregation of men, women, and children, on whom his name has been called, and whom he has elected to be the depository of his word and sacraments. And though he is now lifted high in glory, he does not forget his little flock on earth.

1. To this Church he proposes ever more and more to come, with the illuminations of his Spirit, the comforts of his gracious presence, and the impartation of his life and peace. To this he is continually impelled by the greatness of his love, and by the gracious will of God; and this he is ever showing, in his arrangements to have the way prepared for him, and in his condescension to employ means so simple and lowly as to leave no hindering necessities to prevent the manifestation of his presence to any.

2. And to his Church he in reality does come, except where it is made impossible by the unbelief of men. As the sun pours his blessed illuminations into every part of the world, and makes every place glad with his glorious light, except where his rays are obstructed and barred out; so Christ cometh to his Church, as the King of grace and Prince of peace, making everything joyous and blessed, except those sullen hearts which refuse to admit or acknowledge him, and strive against him, and seek to be rid of him.

3. And the way to enjoy him in his Church is also clearly indicated. Those who are in the way

with him, must be true to his word, and faithful in observing his commands, and persevering in their confession and proclamation of him as the coming one. And if any have hitherto kept themselves aloof, they must listen to the messages which his servants bring them, and willingly give their hearts and possessions, divesting themselves of whatever they may hold dear, in honor of him, and cheerfully join themselves to the company of his followers in confessing and praising him as the very Lord and Saviour. To the disciples who obediently went for what he sent them; to him who freely consented that he should have what he asked; to those who laid down their garments at his feet in acknowledgment of his superior claims; to those who greeted him with their hosannas as the Son and messenger of God; to every one, but the envious, morose, and surly unbelievers; he was revealed in glorious dignity and gladdening benediction. And to all who, with a like temper, behave toward him now, he ever cometh with glory and blessing, and revealeth himself continually more and more.

IV. But again, as Jesus here entered into Jerusalem, so he moveth now for entrance into every heart.

1. He approaches all of us as he approached the holy city. He comes to us as a King, making known to us his divine majesty and glory through knowledge which can come only from God, and verifying his word to every one who receives and

obeys it. He comes to us as the promised one—the true and only Christ—who is the great subject and burden of all the sacred songs of the prophets, and the hope and joy of the pious in every age. He comes to us not in the pomp and display of a king of this world, but in meekness and humility, in forms dignified indeed, but simple, unostentatious and homely, in plain records, easy sacraments, and the common things of life. He comes to us, not to enter into judgment with us, not to condemn us, but to accomplish salvation in us, to re-enact the great scenes of his passion in our souls, nailing our guilt to his cross, breaking the bonds of our captivity, and setting up in us a new dominion of liberty and everlasting blessedness.

2. But to have his coming to our hearts a blessing, it is necessary that we do as did the happy ones in the text. We must disencumber our souls of the lusts and cares of this world, more ready to serve the master than ourselves. We must strip off all supposed righteousness of ours, consenting to have it trampled as worthless into the earth. We must strew his way with willing sacrifices for his honor, and join with those whose highest happiness it is to heap blessings on his name. We must learn believingly to know him as the promised Saviour, and to hail him from our inmost souls as our hope and salvation.

3. And great is the blessedness of those who thus receive the Lord Jesus. Coming to them as a King, he makes them partakers of his excellency, and reflects in them his own divine glory. Coming

to them in gentle meekness, he fills them with the same spirit, and transfuses them with his own gentleness and love. Coming to them neither for combat nor strife, he brings to them peace, and kindles their hearts to joyous songs, and fills their mouths with glad hosannas.

V. Finally, this entry of the Saviour into the holy city calls up another subject, which claims our attention this morning. There are souls in waiting to make their public entry into the spiritual city, of which Jerusalem was a type. It is an entry indeed very unlike that of the blessed Saviour. He entered to work out a redemption beyond the power of men or angels; you, my friends, are about to enter to possess a redemption already achieved. He entered to be condemned and to die; you enter to be absolved and to live. He entered to encounter all the powers of darkness alone; you enter to avail yourselves of his victory, and to enjoy the communion of his saints, and the blessings of his helping presence. And yet there are some points in which the circumstances much resemble.

1. Like his, yours is a triumphal entry. It is the celebration of your victory through grace over the powers which have hitherto held you back from confessing your Lord. It is the celebration of your passage from condemnation, to acquittal and spiritual liberty in Christ Jesus. Nay more, it is the celebration of your entrance upon a real kingship, which is meant to develop into an eternal

regency with Christ himself in all the sublimity of his kingdom. And if his entry into Jerusalem was a glorious day for him, such also is this day to you. Henceforward your names are to appear in the holiest records of earth, and in the book of life in heaven. Henceforward you are to be known as citizens of a celestial empire, and princes of the blood in the realm supernal and eternal. And many are the hearts ready to shout Hosanna at your movement, whilst angels in the presence of God rejoice over what is being done.

2. Like his, however, your entry to-day is not full triumph yet. As there waited a cross for him to bear, so there are crosses of some sort also awaiting you. The Christian life is not all sunshine, nor the Christian's steps always encompassed with hosannas. You will have your Gethsemanes, your buffetings by the world, and your long hours of darkness, suffering, and bitterness. True, you will not have to endure them unaided and alone as he did. He who has trod the way before you, has covenanted to be with you, and to bring you safely through. But in your case, as in his, *No cross, no crown.*

3. Like his, your entry, though triumphal, needs to be marked with meekness, willing obedience and unshrinking courage. Though he was the Lord of glory, he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. . . He humbled himself and became obedient unto death." Phil. 2: 7, 8. And the same mind which was in him, is that which best befits his disciples.

You need to be humble, as we all have reason to be. You need to let your whole heart go with your profession, though it lead to tears and martyrdom. You need to lay yourselves by faith in the arms of God, ever praying, "Not my will, but thine, O Lord, be done."

4. And thus characterized, your entry, like his, shall soon be crowned with everlasting victory At the longest, it will not be long. A few days of conflict and sorrow, and the battle will be over, and the palaces of glory will open to receive you.

Brethren in Christ, and well beloved,
To Jesus and his servants dear,
Enter and show yourselves approved;
Enter and find salvation here.

HOLY THURSDAY.

John 13 : 1–15. Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

UP to this point, this Evangelist has said very little of the special relations of Jesus and the twelve. Now, however, he abundantly makes up for any deficiency on this point. The third part of his Gospel, which begins here, with the exception of two chapters describing the passion, is entirely occupied with the tender, intimate intercourse of the Lord Jesus with "his own," from the evening before his death

to the time he left the earth. The thirteenth and four following chapters relate scenes and discourses from the last hours spent by the Saviour with his disciples previous to his betrayal into the hands of his enemies. He has uttered his final word to the outside world, and withdrawn himself within the bosom of his own family; and we are privileged here to see him in their midst, and to hear his farewell words to them. Reverently does it become us to enter that supper-hall, to become spectators of those farewell scenes and ceremonies.—*Bruce's Training of the Twelve*, p. 342.

The passage now immediately before us, is occupied mostly with that marvellous spectacle of the washing of the disciples' feet. Its contents are much like the fishes in Peter's net, very many, and very great, so that language scarcely had capacity to bring them up out of the depths. Many thoughts and feelings crowd into the Apostle's mind as he proceeds to relate the *memorabilia* of that eventful night. They jostle one another in the struggle for utterance. But the chief thought is that expressed in the prefatory words, that "Jesus, having loved his own which were [left behind] in the world, loved them unto the end." The subject, therefore, for our present consideration is—

THE GREAT LOVE OF CHRIST FOR HIS OWN.

I. *As shown in the diversions it held at bay;*
II. *As shown in the repulsions it surmounted;*
III. *As shown in the condescension it induced;*
IV. *As shown in the blessed sacrament it ordained.*

I. There were certain great and mighty thoughts to occupy the Saviour on this occasion, well fitted to crowd out any special attention to anything else. The apostle refers to some of them, as powerfully exercising the mind of the blessed Master at the time.

One was the consciousness that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world. And knowing the fact, he also knew all the particulars of the tragic exode. Distinctly before him was the prospect, that, in a few hours, he would be betrayed by one of his own disciples, given into the hands of men who thirsted for his blood, dragged before a tribunal bent on condemning him to death, mocked, buffeted, spit upon, scourged, and delivered up to be crucified. All the cruelties of that awful night, all the insults, exposure and anguish of the succeeding day, the thorns, the nails, the thirst, the dying agony, were fully known to him. Nor was this foresight one of the least of the ingredients in his dreadful cup. We can scarcely conceive of anything more disturbing. The actual endurance itself could not be much worse than such a distinct anticipation of it. When certain suffering is inevitably coming upon a man, we are instinctively impelled to conceal it and divert attention from it, that it may not distract and overwhelm in advance. But nothing of the impending woe could be concealed from the blessed Saviour. Naked and open to him was each item in the catalogue of horrors. And yet the tremendous pressure of this foresight did not divert him

from the most tender and considerate attention to those whom he was about to leave. From the open hell of his agony which he saw about to ingulf him, he turned away to the most collected and patient ministrations for their welfare. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

But this consciousness extended beyond the scenes of his humiliation. He not only knew that he was about to suffer and die, but that his departure out of this world was to bring him "unto the Father," and that, having come out from God, he was about to return to God. Beyond the cross appeared a crown—beyond the valley of humiliation, a hill of ascension—beyond the sepulchre, a rising in majesty to the right hand of eternal Godhead. There was a joy set before him for which he endured the cross, despising the shame; and part of that joy was, triumphal return, in humanity, to the glory which he had with the Father, "in the form of God," before the world was, and enthronement far above all principality and power and every name that is named. What new and profound sensations would his reappearance in heaven produce after such an absence on such ar errand! What new and marvellous changes would be wrought in the administrations of the universe by this coronation as its King, a man that had been crucified! And to feel and know that the hour for the consummation of these grand realities had come, how transporting! how fitted to shut off attention from every other subject! Yet such was Christ's affection for his disciples, that not all the

glories of heaven in the act of opening to receive him, nor all the splendors of its throne to which he was just about to be lifted, nor all the sublimities of the return of the only begotten to the Father after the fulfilment of a mission which was the wonder of the universe, could for a moment disturb, divert, or abridge his warm and compassionate attentions to them. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

II. There was likewise much unworthiness and carnal crudeness in these men to repel the Saviour's affection. They did not so love him. A few hours and they all had deserted him and fled. That same night, one of the boldest and most devoted of them, with oaths and cursing, denied that he ever knew him. Another of them was at the time harboring in his secret soul the Satanic instigation to betray him for a price, and had already entered into the murderous plot to deliver him into the hands of his enemies. And in the hearts of all of them worked a most unseemly jealousy and contention as to which of them should have the pre-eminence. The old earthy dreams of worldly thrones still lingered in their imaginations, and the old feuds with reference to them had broken out afresh. "There was a strife among them which of them should be the greatest." Luke 22: 24. No servant being present to wash their feet before partaking of the Paschal feast, neither of them was willing to perform this office for the other, lest he should compromise his dignity, or acknowledge inferi-

ority. It was a very unholy strife, and betrayed a very carnal ambition, intensely offensive to such a heavenly mind as Jesus possessed. Very stoutly also did each persist in his refusal, so that the needed washing was yet unperformed when they came to take their places at the table. The Saviour had given them lesson after lesson on this point, and yet their miserable pride and selfishness had not been cured. Three years and more of earnest teaching and endeavor had he bestowed upon them, and yet they would dwell on these unedifying themes, harbor these ambitious passions, and cling to their carnal strifes even as they approached the holy Passover. How painful the contemplation! How disheartening and repellant to him who had so loved them and done so much for them! And yet, not all the iniquity of the traitor, nor the inconstancy of the best of them, nor all the low jealousies which still lived and worked in them, nor his full knowledge of them and their unworthiness, could dampen his affection for them, or slacken or repulse his profound enlistment for them. Nay, the more unworthy they were of his love, the more intensely did it flame forth, and the more ardent and extraordinary were the manifestations of his anxiety for their good. Indeed we do not half understand, and no plummet-line can sound for us, the depths of that affectionate devotion which the blessed Saviour bears towards poor sinful flesh and blood which he came to redeem. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

III. Wonderful also was the lowly condescension and patient endeavor which this love here induced. Supper-time having come, and the group having taken their places at the table, a most impressive spectacle was enacted by the Saviour for the benefit of these disciples. "He riseth up from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." In a word, the Lord and Master did for his servants what they thought it beneath them to do for each other! John seems to thrill under it yet as he proceeds to describe it. Slowly and solemnly he lingers on each particular of the transaction, and seems to indicate a *Selah* after every clause, admonishing the reader to pause and behold with adoring wonder. What was done, was done in silence; but it enchained the profoundest attention, and spoke with overwhelming power to the hearts and consciences of those who witnessed it. The King of glory, conscious of his Divine majesty, girds himself to serve his servants! He who came forth from God, and was about to return to God, knelt in a menial's attire, to fill a menial's place! He into whose hands the Father had given all things, stooped to employ those hands in washing a traitor's feet!

Nor was it empty sham, Pharisaic show, or mere self-glorifying pretence, like the pantomimic feet-washing of beggars enacted annually by the Pope of Rome; but a pure and honest act of love to ac-

complish a moral result which those wrangling disciples so much needed. Christ knew the ill that was in them, and that this was the remedy for it. Their carnal self-consequence needed to be brought down. Their erroneous conceits and bickering spirit needed to be effectually rebuked. And a very potent application was required to do it. He therefore proceeded to do even for Judas, what no one of them was willing to do for the other, and thus washed their feet that by the moral force of that act he might wash them from an inward defilement.

Nor did he only take the menial's attire and work, but, when Peter objected to be washed by him, and asserted his own impulses and reason against so great a condescension of the Master, Jesus set himself to new efforts to meet these new manifestations of disease. And even Judas, with all his known treachery, was not relinquished to his fate without the most faithful and tender endeavors to bring him to himself, melt his heart, and induce repentance of his wickedness.

And when the washing was finished, and the merciful Lord resumed his place at the table, though knowing all that was to happen, he entered upon a special discourse about what he had done, and preached to these men still another sermon on humility and the true Christian spirit. He reminded them of the titles they were wont to give him, and in the most emphatic manner accepted and claimed them as his due. He asserted himself their Lord and authoritative teacher, whose

doctrine it is their business to learn, and their duty to obey. He tells them that what he had just done was to be a pattern for them, and for all who should come after them; and that if they were not willing thus to serve one another in love and condescension, they were not really washed by him, and could have no part with him, assuring them of the great happiness it would be to them, if, knowing these things, they would only do them.

O the depth of the fidelity, and patience, and tender compassion of our blessed Lord! The Apostle seems to bedew his record with tears as he writes it. Verily, "having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

IV. And yet another monument of his love was set up on this occasion. Though not given in the text, the other Evangelists have stated it in full. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26 : 26–28.

"As the sun among the stars, and man among the sublunary creatures, is the most eminent and noble, the prince of the inferiors, and their measure, or their guide; so," says Jeremy Taylor, "is this action among all the instances of religion, the most perfect and consummate, a union of mysteries, a consolidation of duties. It joins God

and man, and confederates all the societies of men in mutual complexions. It actually performs all that could be necessary for man, and presents to man as great a thing as God could give."

There be those who discern nothing in this sacrament but bread and wine, and see no very great worth or value in it; but Jesus says it is his body and his blood, meant to be received by us as the nutriment of eternal life. Paul assures us that to eat of this blessed bread, is the communion of the body of Christ; and to drink of this blessed cup, is the communion of the blood of Christ. "Taking bread of this our lower creation," says Irenæus, "the Lord confessed that it was his own body, and affirmed that the mingled drink of the cup was his own blood." "He that seals his covenant of faith," says Tertullian, "is henceforth fed with the fatness of the Lord's body, even the Eucharist." "If thou go up with Jesus," says Origen, "to keep the Paschal feast, he both giveth thee the bread of blessing, his own body, and bestoweth upon thee his own blood." "Therefore," says Cyril of Jerusalem, "with full assurance let us partake as of the body and blood of Christ: for in the figure of bread is given to thee his body, and in the figure of wine his blood, that thou by partaking of the body and blood of Christ mightest be made of the same body and blood with him." "When he had washed his disciples' feet," says James of Nisibis, "he sat down at the table and gave them his body and his blood." "We have been taught," says Justin Martyr, "that the food

over which thanksgiving has been made by the prayer of the word which is from him, is the flesh and blood of him, the incarnate Jesus: for the Apostles in their records, which are called the Gospels, have delivered that Jesus so commanded them." With the Apostles, therefore, and the early Church, and resting on the plain words of our blessed Lord himself, we do believe, hold, and confess, that the very body and blood of Christ are verily present in the Lord's Supper, under the form of bread and wine, and are there communicated and received.

Very great and precious, likewise, is this holy sacrament. It is the very crown and completion of all the means of grace. "There is a food," says Julius Firmicus, "which recruiteth the sick, recalleth the erring, raiseth up the fallen, and giveth to the dying the pledge of immortality—the bread of Christ, the cup of Christ." "Breaking this one bread," says Ignatius, "is the medicine of immortality, the antidote that we should not die, but live in Jesus Christ forever." "Let us drink our ransom," says Ambrose, "that by drinking we may be redeemed." "He receiveth who proveth himself, and whoso receiveth shall not die the second death; for the bread is the remission of sins." "Remission of sins, life and salvation are granted unto us in this sacrament," says Luther; "for where there is remission of sins, there life and salvation are also." And if any one should object to such great effects from mere eating and drinking, the answer is, "It is not the eating and

drinking alone, but those words of the Master when he instituted the feast, which are the chief thing in it, and which he that believes has what they declare." Nor is there a more direct, more precious, more certain pledge of the forgiveness of sins, incorporation with the living Christ, and everlasting life, than that which is vouchsafed in this blessed sacrament.

> O Bread to pilgrims given,
> Richer than angels eat!
> O Manna sent from heaven,
> For heaven-born natures meet!

And herein is the great love of Christ manifest toward his own, that, on the very eve of his great passion, he appointed and left to them and us this perpetual legacy and memorial of his affection, in which he continually administers to all believing celebrants of this holy sacrament the very manna and bread of heaven, and incorporates his living self with us as our salvation and our eternal life; a sacrament at which we may sit down at the table of angels, put our hands into the dish with the King of all creatures, feed upon the eternal Son of God, and so conjoin in fellowship the things of earth with things of heaven, that mortality is swallowed up of life, and all sin is destroyed by the inhabitation of its almighty Conqueror. So, then, "having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

O blessed and exalted Jesus, who gavest thyself a sacrifice for our sins, thine example to humiliate our pride, thy word to enlighten our darkened

hearts, thy body for our spiritual food, thy blood to nourish our souls and quench the flames of hell and lust; who didst so love us who were thine enemies that thou desirest only our salvation, and becamest one with us that we might live the same life with thee; open the windows of our souls that we may be full of light, and may see the excellency of thy love, the merits of thy humiliation, the bitterness of thy passion, and the glories and virtues of thy mysterious sacrament. Lord, cause us ever to hunger and thirst after this instrument of righteousness and memorial of thy abiding love. Take away all relish and desire for the corrupt and unsatisfying delights of earth, and enable our souls to dwell on thee. Let our hearts be ever open to receive thee, that we may ever sup and commune with thee, and abide in the pleasures of thy house continually. Thou hast prepared a table for us against them that trouble us. Thou hast girded thyself to wash us, that we may come with pure minds to partake of it. Let that holy sacrament be to us a defence and shield, a nourishment and medicine, life and health, a means of comfort, sanctification, and spiritual growth. Thyself conduct us to thine altar, that, receiving the body of our dear Lord, we may be one with his mystical body, and of the same Spirit united with the indissoluble bonds of faith, hope, and never-failing charity, that from this veiled communion we may pass at length to behold thee in eternal clearness, and eat and drink with thee in thine everlasting Kingdom. Amen.

HOLY THURSDAY NIGHT.

(PASSION HISTORY, AGONY IN THE GARDEN.)

THE whole life of Jesus was one of humiliation and suffering. From his manger to his cross, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. But in all his previous afflictions, whether of body or of soul, there still were some bright flashes of his superior dignity and glory. Words of greatness and works of might accompanied him, which made men wonder, and compelled them to think of Deity come down into their presence. In his last days, however, these signs of his higher nature and majesty gradually disappeared. The potent word subsided into pathetic prayer, tremulous complaint, and a cry of anguish. His splendid miracles ceased. The poverty and lowliness of his outward estate seemed to settle inward, and to overcloud his whole being. There was no real diminution of moral glory, but it was conjoined now with an augmented depression, which increased with every step, and deepened with every moment, till life went out upon the cross. And into these awful depths we are now called to follow him. May the Lord dispose our minds so as to be profited by our attempt to comply!

The prayers in the supper-hall have ended. The sacred Halel has been sung. And from the heights

of the city Jesus descends to the low vale of the Kedron, and betakes himself to Gethsemane.

In the providences of God, there is often a singular correspondence between events, and the places at which they occur. Things elevated connect with elevations; things sorrowful, with low places; and great victories and recoveries, with surroundings answering to the scenes of the original disaster. It was so in this case.

A very low and deep gorge is that through which lies the rocky bed of Kedron. It is the deepest indentation in the neighborhood of the holy city. On the one side of it were the lofty buttresses and surmounting walls of the city itself, and on the other was the steep ascent of the Mount of Olives, the highest summit in the vicinity. Along the rocky sides of this gorge were the tombs of prophets. And down into these low depths—lower than the foundations of the city—among the roots of the Mount of Olives—and as if quite beneath and hidden away from all the living world around him, the blessed Saviour descended. When he was transfigured, he went up into an high mountain. When he was triumphantly received up into heaven, it was from an exalted summit. But when he entered upon the dreadful scenes of his last conflicts and passion, we find him in the deep valley.

He found there a *garden*—an inclosed and beautified spot, to which he had often resorted for retirement during his stays at Jerusalem. And as it was not mere chance that took him to the valley, it was not unmeaning accident that led him to the

garden. Man was created in a garden, which was the happy home of his innocence. He fell in a garden, and there became alienated from God, from heaven, and from hope. And as it was in a garden that the curse of sin first touched our world, Christ first tasted the cup of its condemnation in a garden.

The punishment of crime often meets the offender in the very locality of the offence. Samson's eyes are put out at Gaza, just where he made such unchaste use of them. The dogs licked up Ahab's blood on the spot where he had Naboth slain. And where human transgression begun, there Jesus felt the first dreadful pangs of its expiation.

The garden was called Gethsemane;—"*the oil-press.*" It was a garden of olives, and a place where olives were trodden and pressed; and hence a place in striking harmony with the bruising and oppression of soul which the Saviour there experienced. It was Gethsemane before he went into it; but it was particularly Gethsemane for him. A pressure there came upon the Son of God such as never was felt on earth till then. In order that "the oil of joy and gladness" for the wounds of humanity, and for the beautifying of the marred face of man, might flow, he himself was there put under the lever.

It was night-time. Even the smallest circumstances unite in symbolizing the nature of the mysterious transaction. The season of midnight, and the deep gloom of that retired place, low down

under the shadows of the mountains, bespoke the dreadful darkness which there came upon the Lord of glory. It seems almost like sacrilege to lift those shades, or to attempt to pry into a scene in which a Being so Divine appears in such woful obscuration and abandonment. And yet, the Spirit of God conducts us to the contemplation of it, and the duties of piety demand that we should enter the sacred gloom, and look.

Hardly had the blessed Saviour entered within those gates, till "he began to be sorrowful," "and to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy." The very strongest words in the Greek language are called into requisition to express the condition of sorrow and distress into which he was thrown. The intimation in every utterance is, that something unexampled and indescribably awful came over him. The disciples, as a body, are requested to seat themselves and tarry behind, whilst he withdraws to a distance for prayer. "Peter, and James, and John" alone are permitted to accompany him. But he did not go far until faintness and horror seized upon him.

"*He began to be sorrowful.*" Not only sorrowful, as we say in English, but λυπεῖσθαι—*agonized*, intensely distressed, made to shake with the faintness of pain.

"*And to be sore amazed.*" The word ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι, means to be awe-struck, to be seized with sudden and horrifying alarm at the contemplation of some terrifying object. The sense here is, that the

Saviour began to show feelings of dread and horror as if some inexpressible disaster were on the point of overwhelming him.

"*And very heavy*"—αδημονεῖν, to be cast down with extreme anguish. When Epaphroditus was "sick nigh unto death," and the tidings came to him from his friends that they were despairing of ever seeing him again, the deep sadness and dejection which came upon him at that moment, is the "full of heaviness" which is here said to have come upon the suffering Jesus. He was weighed down to the very verge of death, and ready to sink into death.

And, to what the disciples *saw*, he adds a description of his own. "Jesus said unto them, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*"—περιλυπος, compassed about with great pain and distress—"*even unto death.*" Every fresh word in the account conducts us into still deeper and deeper depths of inward torture and soul-anguish. There is first great and oppressive sorrow and pain, and then the same heightened into exceeding horror, and then that height of sudden seizure settled into a death-weight upon him, and then a compassing about of his soul with distress to the point of dislocating the framework of his immortal being! Fain would he be alone, and yet a human cry for sympathy would hardly allow of his consenting to be alone. Fain would he have the accompanying disciples tarry behind while he went further, and yet he would have them watch with him, praying that they might not fall into temptation.

And what he had described to his three disciples in words, soon showed itself in external effects. He started to walk; but his limbs presently gave way under him. "He went forward a little," "and was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast and kneeled down," "and fell on his face," "on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him." And he said: "Abba, Father," "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

We know what that cup was; it was the cup of death in the sinner's place—the cup of the wrath of God upon sin—the cup of the world's condemnation for its iniquities, the cup of which he was then tasting; and the dregs of which he afterwards exhausted on the cross. Of the dreadful bitterness of that cup, we may have some faint idea from the miseries, tears and woes which sin has developed in our world, and from the fruits which we are forewarned shall come of it in the eternal experiences of the finally lost. To drink that cup was to take in upon one's self all the guilt and punishment and wrath of God due to all the sins of all men. And to think of drinking such a cup might well fill even the Son of God with horror. Yet, that horror Jesus here endured. Shaken to the deepest centre of his being, and prostrate upon the earth, with all his high nature, he is made to cry unto God as if he had come to the margin of perdition itself. O the depths! the depths! of his agony!

And still the picture heightens. Though "there

appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him," he was neither comforted nor relieved; but, "*being in an agony*"—εν ἀγωνία, in a violent struggle, wrestling with horror and death as if in the very spasms of annihilation,—"*he prayed more earnestly.*" It would seem impossible to find words to express the duplicated intensity of his outcries, betokening the still intenser violence with which he was internally convulsed.

"*And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground.*" Few men have ever felt an inward anguish competent to bring blood from the pores of their bodies. The French King, who had given his royal sanction to the cold-blooded massacre of the thousands of Protestants who perished for their faith on St. Bartholomew's Eve, when under the horrors of remorse which befell him on his death-bed, is said to have given forth bloody sweat. If what is said of him be true, the agony which so affected him was nothing less than the pains of hell already fixed in his soul. And when such manifestations exhibited themselves in such a marvellous degree, in one so pre-eminently strong and celestially strengthened and divinely innocent as Jesus, we do injustice to the facts, not to find in what he suffered an agony equivalent to all the horrors of eternal damnation condensed. Well might he come to his disciples with plaints and entreaties, as if he felt it next to impossible for him to exist under it. Such prayer three times repeated, such utterances, such descriptions, and such physical phenomena, open to

us a climax of grief, conflict, and woe, which none but himself ever knew, and which would have dissolved angels had they been compelled to bear it. Was there ever sorrow like unto his sorrow! Upon no Socinian theory of redemption can it be satisfactorily explained how it came that the blessed Saviour was so dreadfully shaken in these awful hours. That he should be a sufferer was not strange. The noblest and best of men have often been the most afflicted, tried, and wronged. But that such a tempest of horror should envelop them in their last hours, is inexplicable. Other good men have endured as trying a death as his, outwardly considered. And if he was nothing more than a prophet and reformer, we had better close the gates of Gethsemane forever, and not permit its scenes to come any more into view; for then the great Master has not shown the courage displayed by some of his weakest followers.

But true Christians do not so account the sufferings of their Lord. The battle he fought was one which no mere martyr ever knew. The death he endured was one which no mere hero of the truth ever tasted. He bled for the cause he represented and for the doctrines he taught; but this was not all. A deeper mystery is that upon which our contemplations fasten. His soul was made an offering for sin. Is. 53 : 10. He died as an expiation of the guilt and condemnation of the world. His anguish in the garden had reference to a transaction in which God "made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God

in him." 2 Cor. 5 : 21. And it is only as we take with us the great root-doctrine of vicarious endurance of the condemnation due to human guilt, that we can enter Gethsemane, without making it the place of wreck for all our Christian hopes, and the graveyard of all our Saviour's claims and glories. Admit what Isaiah (53 : 6), in prophetic vision, testified nearly a thousand years before, that "*the Lord made the iniquities of us all to meet on him*," and we have the only star to guide us safely through that awful darkness.

Was the blessed Saviour thrilled with mental horror in the garden? We might well expect it to be so, when he there found himself about to be delivered up to judgment, not for the sin of Adam only, but for all the sins of all the race, past, present, and to come. An ocean of guilt was to be expiated—a world of crime was to be cancelled —ages upon ages of rebellion were to be satisfied for—and a multitudinous accumulation of iniquity, depravity, and sin, balanced only by the fathomless horrors of an eternal hell, was to find its equivalent of blood and suffering in his lone self before another day should pass! And when we consider how he immersed himself in man's estate, and took all earth's guilt upon his own innocent person, and linked himself with our sinful race, and had it upon him to answer for all human crimes, and was now come to the dreadful hours in which to meet and exhaust the length and breadth and depth and height of wrath and judgment due to them, we cannot wonder at his sore

amazement. If King Charles sweated blood when he came to realize that he was about to be brought into judgment for one man's sins, what must it have been for the holy Jesus to realize that he was now at the point of being judged for all the sins of all men!

No, no; it was not death which Jesus feared; nor the forefelt pain, and shame, and torment of his ensuing crucifixion, that so agonized and disturbed his soul. To entertain such thoughts would be to dishonor him more than the cross itself. Many thousands of his blessed martyrs have welcomed no less bodily tortures with smiles and gratulations, and made sport of the cruelties which their tyrannical persecutors invented to be insufferable. And if their weakness was thus undaunted by physical sufferings, how could it be that his superior power was so shocked and shaken at the same? Oh no, it was not death, nor the cross that was such a terror to him. It was the awful penalty of sin. It was the judgment due to the guilt of the world. It was the great wrath of God upon immeasurable transgressions. Death he could easily endure. The cross he could readily bear. But to be made a curse for sin—to fall under the infinite wrath and judgment of the eternal Father, to be steeped in all the fiery pangs and darkness and death of hell—to bear in his lone self an equivalent for all the horrid infamies of all men, was a different thing, and well might fill the Son of God with trembling and dismay!

But, our adorable Lord did not swerve. Though

wrung and shaken as if the immortal fabric of his soul was about to give way, he held steadily to his purpose, and obediently consented to drink the dreadful cup. Borne down at the idea to the very brink of annihilation, and sweating blood at every pore, he looked up and said: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, *thy will be done.*"

Brethren, behold the man! Consider the anguish of his soul, the awfulness of his sufferings, and learn the bitterness of sin by the calamities required to expiate it. What pain, what fear, what strife, what horror was in his sacred breast! Yet, with what patience, humility, and obedience he submitted to it all! He had no need to leave his unbroken peace and glory with the Father, to come into such misery and torment. It was out of love and mercy to us that he did it. It was our curse he took upon him; it was for our guilt he sustained this unspeakable burden. He was in this agony that we might not be in hell. He sweated blood, that we might not be scorched with unquenchable fire. Even the eternal Father seems to stop his ears to the awful cries of his own dear Son, that redemption might come to the guilty children of men; and the holy Lamb of God yields himself to drink the cup of infinite woe, that from it might issue pardon, life, and health upon his enemies! Yet so willing was that precious blood to flow for us, that it began to come forth in advance of the tortures of his persecutors, and wrung itself out in agonies of prayer before

his wounds were opened by his tormentors. O that our hearts could bleed unto him with true compunction for those sins of ours which cost him such experiences! O that we could rightly abhor every wickedness and fault of ours, not one of which could ever be forgiven but for these his awful sufferings! O that we could duly apprehend the mercy, imitate the charity, copy the humility, and adore and love the person of Him who endured such woes that they might not fall on us!

Ye blessed spirits who came with sympathizing comfort to our afflicted Saviour, how did ye look on the Son of God, thus crushed down under these violences of anguish! With what amazement did ye behold your Lord and Maker thus shaken and bleeding, and inwardly tortured to the brink of spiritual dissolution, for the sake of guilty men!

O Holy Jesus, thy goodness is infinite; thy mercy is past finding out. Pity us in that we do not more deeply feel nor more justly lament the baseness of the sins that brought thee to such depths. O let thy righteousness cover us, and thy stripes heal us; that thou being our surety and Physician we may be brought into the unity of thy merits, share in the virtue of thy sufferings, and be saved from the miseries due our sins and hardness. By the example of thy meek obedience, conform us to the will of that eternal God who is our gracious Father, that we may accept what his Providence chooses for us, know no desires but his commands, trust in Him in all our sorrows,

and wait for deliverance in such times and ways as He hath reserved in his own counsels. By the fervency of thy prayers incite us to prayer, and by thy gracious intercessions supply what is wanting in our devotions, procuring for us such guidance and support as may serve our great needs, and such favors as thy passion has purchased and thy love and goodness delights to bestow upon those who seek the benefits of thy mediation. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY.

Matt. 27 : 35. And they crucified him.

HESE words bring us to the closing scenes of our Saviour's earthly life. The agonies of the garden have been felt; the treachery of Judas has been acted out; the seizure of the innocent one has been effected. The sham of a trial has been concluded. The council has condemned him. The disciples have forsaken him. Peter has denied him. The soldiers have scourged, buffeted, mocked, and spit upon him. The thorny crown has been thrust upon his brow. The governor has given him over into the hands of the unrighteous. Bound, bleeding, and faint, he has passed the *via dolorosa*. As a sorrowful prisoner he appears on Calvary's summit. And here the bitter close of all is about to be enacted.

Friends and brethren, with becoming solemnity, let us now look on, and see how they killed the Lord of glory, and mark the circumstances of the awful tragedy. And may the Lord himself quicken and soften our hearts to the oft-told, but ever new, and never-wearying story! Notice,

I. What was done to the Saviour;
II. How He conducted Himself under it;
III. What Results followed.

"And they crucified him."

It would seem as if we ought not to obtrude ourselves into the presence of a scene of anguish and shame such as these few words describe. It hardly seems fitting for mortal eyes to look upon such humiliation of so Divine a Being. The promptings of our hearts are rather to cover our faces, and hide away in sackcloth and ashes, from becoming the witnesses of the spectacle. And yet it is important that we should look, that we may see, and know, and feel, what our blessed Lord and Saviour has done for us. Nay, he himself invites us to the contemplation; and would that all men should pause and ponder the lengths, and breadths, and depths, and heights, of what redeeming love has borne and suffered.

I. Consider, then, what they did to him. The thing is quickly told. A few words give it. The Evangelist seems loth to dwell on the details. In one simple, but comprehensive sentence, he narrates the massive facts. "*They crucified him.*"

We are at no loss to know what crucifixion was, as practiced by the Romans, or the usual mode of such executions. Two beams were selected, and fastened together, the one across the other. On these beams the criminal was fixed, his arms stretched out with the one, and his body and lower extremities with the other. The foot end of the main beam was then planted firmly in the earth, and the poor sufferer left suspended in the air until he was dead. There were occasional variations in

the details; but our information is quite minute enough to show how the thing was done in the case of our blessed Lord.

Having arrived at the place of execution, he was first stripped of his clothing. This was a common part of the particular shame and dishonor attaching to this mode of punishment. It is also particularly alluded to, both in the ancient prophecies, and in the evangelic narratives. The Psalmist, long before, had spoken of the parting of Christ's garments among the brutal soldiers who did the work; and Matthew and Mark tell how it was fulfilled, under the very eyes of the sufferer, as soon as the cross upon which he hung was planted. "They parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take." This was before he was dead; and hence those garments had been taken from him at the beginning of the awful proceeding.

Having stripped him, they bound him upon the stake, his arms to the cross-beam, and his feet to the main. Strong nails were brought, and driven, one through the palm of each hand, and one through the instep of each foot. The whole fabric, with the suffering Saviour thus pinioned to it, was lifted up, dropped into its socket, and made fast, as men would plant a post. The cords were then removed, and the innocent Lamb of God left to hang by his hands and feet, the flesh meanwhile stripping from the bones!

For many long and dreadful hours the Son of God thus hung in shame and agony, his life's blood ebbing slowly away, his anguish increasing

with every minute, and even the poor relief of death delayed!

We can hardly suppose a human being living who would not melt with pity and compassion at the spectacle. Had Jesus been a slave, and the most ill-deserving on earth, we would still think the sight enough to touch and stir any heart. Yet there were people who enjoyed it, and did everything in their power to intensify the pain and grief. Again and again they came to and by the place, looking on with fiendish pleasure, shouting reviling words at the sufferer, and wagging their heads in malignant derision. Even the highest dignitaries did not feel it beneath them to come and gaze, and mock. Tauntingly they called out in his hearing: "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Luke 23:39–43. And when, in the depths of his unprecedented agony, he cried to God—cried a cry which sent a thrill of horror through all heaven—they laughed at him, and said, "Behold, he calleth Elias." This, then, is what they did to him.

II. Consider next how he conducted himself under it. The prophets foretold how he would act; and the Evangelists have recorded how he did act.

Not a word of complaint escaped from his lips. When first seized, he showed how easily he might have saved himself, if he had chosen: but he

yielded himself meekly into his enemies' hands, to bear and suffer whatever they might inflict upon him. He did not court or dare their malice, nor grasp the cross from them to lay it on himself; but whatsoever they had a mind to impose upon him he took, without expostulation or resistance. He did not shrink from any shame or any cruelty to which they wished to subject him. When the nails were set upon his hands and feet, he did not move a muscle to hinder their being driven through his flesh. And in all his lingering and awful anguish, he did not ask a single abatement of his penalty, or the relief of a single pain. The cup was put to his lips, and he patiently drank it to its dregs!

He spoke, but never in the way of murmur or severity. Seven times he spoke; but those words were for other purposes than complaint of the wrongs inflicted. They also present an essential part of the story of his behavior under his torments and indignities, as of the illustration of the nature of Christianity itself.

The first word was a prayer; not for himself, not for his friends, not for God's interference to punish his murderers, but that those engaged in this bloody work might not be held responsible for what they did! As the hammers fell, which drove the rugged irons through his quivering limbs, he spoke; but his words were: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. The sharpest bruises by which his sacred body was torn, extorted only words of in-

tercession for the brutal men who were inflicting them! It is said that Socrates prayed for his enemies in his last hours; but Socrates felt no such pains and shame as Jesus felt, and showed no goodness in his death halfway to what this prayer at such a moment evinced.

The second word was one of filial affection and tenderness. "There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!" The meaning of these expressions was well understood. It was the loving child, even amid the dreadful anguish of crucifixion, turning away his thoughts from his own agonies, to comfort and provide for the aged and heart-broken woman who had borne him. Though soul and body were being rent asunder, he still had thoughtfulness, patience, feeling, and self-control, rising above all the shame and pain, to consider the griefs and needs of the mother who had loved him. "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." John 19:25–27.

The third word was one of mercy. Near him hung a thief, justly suffering for his crimes. At first, this malefactor joined the rest in reviling the blessed Saviour; but his mind changed, and he began to defend and confess. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom." We would hardly expect an ap-

peal, from such a source, at such a time, to receive much attention. But not even the pains of hell, which had hold of the bleeding Lamb, could crowd out of his favorable notice any honor sincerely rendered to him as the Saviour of men. Dying himself, he could yet hear prayer; and he gathered up his fainting energies to open to this guilty petitioner the gates of promise and blessing. Looking to the expiring culprit, "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Luke 33 : 39–43.

The fourth word was a cry, the like of which perhaps was never uttered but once, and the depths and meaning of which perhaps but one Being shall ever know. The mixed Hebrew and Syriac words, recorded just as they fell from his lips, show how profoundly the apostle's heart was affected by this cry, and how inexpressibly awful and mysterious it was. It is usually described as a cry of desertion. "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt. 27 : 46. "*Forsaken!*" This is the saddest word in human language. Even when it is said of one deserted by men—father, mother, husband, friends—it is a word of sorrowful desolation. But here it is spoken of a desertion by God! Who can fathom the freezing horror which attaches to it in such an application!

But we dare not press it too far. Really, Jesus was not utterly forsaken. The first words of the exclamation, twice repeated, express an abiding confidence, prohibiting the idea of complete aban

donment. To be able to look up to that great Spirit "from whom all things proceed, and on whom all creatures depend," and in words of truth and reality to say of Him and to Him, "MY *God*, MY *God*," is still to be possessed of assurance of His presence and all-sufficient aid, leaving no gap of unbridged desertion between him who uses it, and Him to whom it is addressed. And when the suffering Saviour could still see and realize that God was HIS GOD, dark and awful as was the eclipse that had come upon his soul, it would be erroneous to suppose that all the moral and spiritual ligaments between him and the eternal Father had been clean severed.

Nevertheless, the expression reveals a depth of woe and darkness into which he was plunged, which had about it the aspect and terrors of a total abandonment by God. All the assistance, peace, joy, and comfort, by which God ordinarily stands by those who trust in Him, were suspended. It was as if the Father had effectually and forever retired from him. He had not let go his hold and confidence in God, but he had come into horrors of experience, as if lost to all hope. It was not only the anguish of a man in conflict with awful physical sufferings and death—not only the mental and inward pangs of shame, mockery, and scorn, so profusely heaped upon his sensitive soul, but a deeper and more spiritual horror,—the mysterious and awful launching upon him of that curse of God which ever clings to sin. He had taken the place of the guilty, and he experienced

the penalty which belongs to trangression. And it was as if hell itself had been emptied upon his soul, causing him to feel throughout all his mysterious person the thrill of condemnation and wrath due to the sins of a fallen world.

The Scriptures everywhere tell us that Jesus drank an unseen cup of bitterness, which would have dissolved any other being; and this cry connects with the shock he felt when God laid upon him the iniquity of us all. It gives evidence of what an evil and bitter thing sin is; what a fate it entails upon the unsaved; what a sacrifice has been made to extricate us from it; and how fully our arrearages have been paid off, if only we have Jesus for our Saviour.

The fifth word was, "*I thirst.*" It was not an expression of physical anguish simply. This was the lowest and smallest part of its significance. The narrative assigns it much higher connections and meaning. Christ's thirst extended far beyond the fever and exhaustion that were weighing him down to death. The record is: "Jesus therefore, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." There was a burning zeal and longing for the fulfilment of all for which he had come into the world; and this was his highest thirst, even in his dying moments. He came to do and suffer the Father's will, and he was straitened and oppressed to see it accomplished. He had submitted thus far, and knowing what part of the work was now done, his soul was eager to meet

all that yet remained, and to realize the consummation of all that had been spoken of him. It was the thirst of devoted zeal and confidence, even amid the horrors of death, to fulfil the Scriptures, and to see of the travail of his soul. It was a death-thirst of the exhausted body, but still more a soul-thirst for the complete victory, and the fruits thereof. It was a thirst for thirsting souls. It was not spoken to God, to angels, or to the men who crucified him, so much as the announcement of the manner of spirit that was in him, of his joy to do the work of his mediatorship in every item of what was written, and of ever-living desire and longing to have men find redemption through his blood. It was not so much for water or vinegar for his parched earthly lips, but for that far more refreshing libation received in the thirst of penitent souls to be saved by what he did and suffered. Even in his death-agonies he thirsts for men to thirst for him, that he may see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

And closely akin to this was the sixth word. With all the untold sufferings which the Saviour endured, he seems never to have had his mind and heart diverted by them from the great object for which he submitted to them. With that object every utterance he made was more or less connected. And as he burned with thirst to have all successfully fulfilled, the moment at length came in which he felt and knew that all was forever accomplished. He had come to the dying point, at which his humiliation reached its utmost possi-

ble depths; and, conscious of the fact, he gave out the assuring word, "*It is finished.*" There remained no deeper woe to be encountered, and no further dregs of suffering to be drunk. The sacrifice was made; the fury of the law was exhausted; the Scriptures were fulfilled; the work of endurance for the guilt of man was done; and the victory now began to dawn upon his dying heart.

There remained, therefore, but one more word to be uttered,—his last farewell to mortal life: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." And with this word his earthly being ended forever. "Having said thus, he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." John 19:30. He went into these dread sufferings calling upon the endearing name of the Father, and he ended them with that selfsame name upon his dying lips! Happy he who, in the extremity of life, can look back upon his career as so "finished," as to be able to commit himself with like confidence into the keeping of the Almighty!

III. A word now as to the results of all this.

Considering who Christ was, and the depths of ignominy, wrong, and agony to which he was subjected, we might reasonably expect some tokens of sympathy in the world of nature around. Marvellous manifestations occurred in connection with much inferior events. In the days of Joshua, and in sympathy with his cause, the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. In the days of Hezekiah, the shadow on the

dial of Ahaz went back ten degrees, in token of the unfaltering purpose of Jehovah to perform his will. And when the very Son of God was crucified and slain, the universe of which he was the Maker must needs have given some signs of condolence and indignation.

At other periods of the Saviour's life, nature gave many significant attestations to him. At his birth there was a commotion among the stars, signalling to the priest-astronomers from afar that the Star had arisen in Jacob, and that the long-expected King of Israel had come. When he appeared at the marriage of Cana, "the modest water saw its God, and blushed." When the storm was abroad upon the Galilean sea, the winds and the waves acknowledged him, and laid themselves down in quiet at his feet. And when he was thus mangled, and tortured, and killed, we would expect some corresponding demonstrations in the inanimate things of the creation.

And a great consternation did befall the universe at this crucifixion. The sun was smitten at its meridian height, and suddenly became black as sackcloth of hair, and for three hours refused to give forth its light upon a scene so awful. Whether the darkness extended over the whole earth, or over Judea only, we do not certainly know; but Phlegon mentions a mysterious obscuration of the sun at noon, and combined with an earthquake in Bithynia, which would seem to be the same of which the Gospel speaks. In neither case was it an ordinary eclipse; for the moon was full, as

always at the passover, when no natural eclipse of the sun could take place. This darkness also lasted three hours, whilst an eclipse, from ordinary causes, could not have been for one-twelfth of that time. It was God's miraculous signal from the sky of the momentous character of what was being done on Golgotha.

Other marvellous symptoms also showed themselves. There was a rending of the temple's vail, unaccountably tearing it in two, from the top to the bottom. "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent," so that "when they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly, this was the Son of God." "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts" in consternation, and hastened away in terror from the spot. Matt. 27 : 54; Luke 33 : 48.

But, awful and significant as all these manifestations were, they were only the temporary, external, and physical effects of our Saviour's crucifixion. There were others of deeper, higher, spiritual, and everlasting moment. Volumes would be required to set them out in their fulness, and yet there cannot be a Gospel sermon, or an evangelical prayer, without somehow embracing them.

The crucifixion of Christ gave to the Church its sublimest and most central theme. What the Apostles preached was, "Christ, and him cruci-

fied." What they gloried in above all things was, "the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." All the preaching, all the believing, all the hoping, all the approved confessions in all the Christian ages, and of the universal Christian Church, have crystallized about this one golden thread. It was the subject on which prophets and apostles dwelt, to which the holy martyrs clung, by which the great Reformation was wrought, and in which our holy religion lives. It is the inspiration of our most cherished hymns, the basis of our sacraments, the glory of our pulpits, and the chief joy of our Christian homes. And if anything in the doings, hopes, and calculations of men speak not according to this great key-note of our faith, it is because there is no light in them; for the light of the world is "Christ, and him crucified."

The crucifixion of Christ established a city of refuge for guilty men, to which all may betake themselves, and be forever safe against the avenger of blood. Its principal intent, and that for which the Son of God submitted to it, was, that he might satisfy the broken law, and bring in an everlasting righteousness, by which sin might be covered, and sinners absolved and justified. And that which was intended, has been effected. "There is, therefore, now no more condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Rom. 8 : 1. Having fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, they have a strong consolation. They are free. Their oppressors are dead. Never again can they be called into judgment for the sins which they

have abandoned, or the ungodliness of which they have repented.

The crucifixion of Christ was the opening of a fountain for the washing away of sin and uncleanness. The infallible record is, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1 : 7. It is the purpose and decree of God, in the body of his flesh, through death, to present those who were sometime alienated and enemies, holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight. Col. 1 : 21, 22. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. 2 : 14. "And suffered without the gate, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood." Heb. 13 : 12. Joyfully, therefore, the Church ever sings:

> There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
> And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
> Lose all their guilty stains.

The crucifixion of Christ was the stretching forth of an almighty arm of love to help, comfort, and deliver in every time of need. "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For in that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb. 2 : 14, 18.

To that great Rock of strength fast clinging,
Assailed by doubt, beset by care and fear,
Through tears we smile, and spend our lives with singing,
Knowing his potent words, "*Be of good cheer.*"

Who shall divide us from that deep affection
Felt by the Living Father for His own?
Who shall disturb us under His protection,
Now ransomed with the blood of His dear Son?

Not all the angel hosts that have existence,
Not all the powers of darkness and of death,
Not lapse of ages, nor the bounds of distance,
Can pluck us from this resting-place of faith.

Not pain or trouble, sorrow or affliction,
Famine or peril, nakedness or sword,
Can rob us of that heavenly benediction—
The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Finally, the crucifixion of Christ, sore and dreadful as it was, gave to the believing soul a pillow on which to lie down and die in peace and hope. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law;" but the death of Jesus did away with sin to every one that believeth, and forever satisfied the law and all its charges against those who rest upon him as their salvation. Both the sting of death and the power of sin are, therefore, vanquished and destroyed by the Saviour's cross. Death now is disarmed, mutilated, transformed, and becomes a peaceful sleep to them that die in the Lord. Long before the Saviour came, his word rung out from heaven: "O death! I will be thy plagues; O grave! I will be thy destruction." Hos. 13:14. And now that he has been in the

world, and suffered its woes, and died its death, the apostolic hymn of triumph is, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15 : 55–57.

O the magnificence of good, and blessing, and hope, which comes to mankind through the mysteries of the Saviour's cross! No wonder that the Church has always manifested such sacred regard for the mere sign of it. It is the symbol of the sublimest benediction that the infinite love of God has devised for fallen men. Through it is salvation and blessedness, high as heaven, and lasting as eternity. Behold it, behold it steadfastly, ye sin-bound and conscience-stricken, and take courage, "and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1 : 13.

In the Cross of Jesus glory;
  Towering o'er the wrecks of time,
All the light of sacred story
  Gathers round its head sublime.
When the woes of life o'ertake you,
  Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Behold the Cross, 'twill ne'er forsake you,
  There you find eternal joy.

EASTER SUNDAY.

MARK 16 : 1–8. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdelene, and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great.

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen: he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall you see him, as he said unto you.

And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid.

THE humiliation of Jesus reached its lowest depths when he "gave up the ghost." Everything after that moment gave symptoms of change in the current of affairs. The very enmity which crucified him started up heroes in his favor. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both men of influence and position, who had till then been only his secret friends, now came forward to prevent any further indignities to what remained of the crucified one, begged the charge of his body, and disposed of it as we would not have anticipated. He who died

as one of the worst of malefactors, friendless and penniless, yet found a decent burial, and an honorable grave. The darkness of his humiliation had passed its midnight, and everything now began to give token of coming day. What further his enemies did against him, only made his approaching triumph more conspicuous and unmistakable. Even his descent into hell was more a thing of victory than of abasement. Good Friday accomplished, Easter is close at hand; and all that intervenes gives indication of its approach. Rich and great men seek possession of the body of him that was crucified. The Governor, under the authority of Cæsar, cheerfully gives command that it be committed into their hands. The rejected of men has his grave with the rich. The seal of state is put upon his tomb. The soldiers of the empire are placed on guard around his sepulchre. The women gather spices to embalm his remains. Devils in hell tremble before the majesty of his presence and power. Spirits in prison are made sensible of a new achievement in the universe, of which he is the hero. Angels in glory are dispatched on new embassies, and mysteriously move about the place where his body lay. The rocks themselves become uneasy. Dead men in their graves stir with animation. And a new era breaks upon the course of time.

Come we now to that tomb of the crucified one? The seal is broken. The stone is taken away from its mouth. The guard is gone, overwhelmed and dispersed by signs of divine majesty

and wonder. The linen clothes are there, and the napkin that was about his head, folded and laid carefully aside. But the body of Jesus has disappeared. Loving women, in their perplexity, are crying: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." John 20 : 2. Half-frantic disciples are running to the place, not knowing what these things mean. But angels in their joy are answering: "HE IS RISEN: *he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.*" Blessed news! Joyous tidings! Solemn wonder! Glorious triumph! Yet this is the message which this genial morning brings us. O glad Easter-tide! that tells of a resurrected Christ, an immortal Jesus, an almighty Saviour! Well may we gather flowers for the altar, and tune our voices to exultant songs, and call every instrument of music to our aid, to give utterance to the holy cheer which such an occasion carries with it.

For many weary weeks have we been occupied with the story of conflict, and suffering, and sadness. But to-day the voice of rejoicing is in the tabernacles of the righteous; for now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. We enter his gates with thanksgiving, and come into his courts with praise. Sorrow gives way to joy, and the place of gloom springs up with flowers! Blessing,

and glory, and honor, and power be unto him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive forevermore, and hath the keys of death and of hell! HALLELUIA! AMEN! HALLELUIA!

It is difficult, on such a high festival, to select a line of thought or remark that at all rises to equality with the occasion. The noblest human language drags and flags in its attempts to keep pace with the grandeur of the simple facts. And when we have thought and said to the utmost of our power, far above all our efforts towers the majesty of the subject, like a Himalayan mountain, whose roots touch the deepest heart of the world, and whose summit reaches into the unknown heavens. It is too wonderful for us, too high for us to attain unto it. Yet there are some fragments lying round its base which we may observe and classify, and with which we may profitably occupy ourselves.

Guided, then, by the Gospel which the Church this day sets before us, let us devoutly consider what Easter is in some of those more personal blessings and consolations which it brings to us.

WHAT IS EASTER?

I. *It is the rolling away of sorrow from distressed and loving hearts.* Three holy women here appear in view: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome." They had been diligent attendants upon the Saviour's teachings. They had often journeyed with him. They had learned to love and revere him with the profoundest affec-

tion. They followed with him when he was led forth to crucifixion. They watched near the cross while he hung upon it. They looked on when he was taken down. And they were present to see him deposited in the grave. Nor did their affection die with him, or cease with his sepulture. In quiet and grief they waited till the Sabbath was passed; but by the time the succeeding morning broke, they were together, with their arms filled with sweet spices, and on their way to do offices of love to his lifeless remains. It was a beautiful picture of womanly sympathy, redolent with the sweet odors of bruised and bleeding attachment. But a great embarrassment was in the way of their intended work of honor to their crucified Lord. A great stone was upon the entrance of the sepulchre, and they knew not how to remove it. Like a leaden weight upon their lacerated hearts hung the unsolved question: "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Poor, troubled souls! They had seen their Lord and friend barbarously put to death; and now, for this last little office of love to his mangled body, they found this heavy impediment in their way. They were in profound affliction over his cruel murder, but here was a new sorrow to oppress and hinder their affectionate desires.

But they had not yet learned what Easter morning brings. When they came to the sepulchre, and looked, "they saw that the stone was rolled away." The soldiers were gone. The seal was broken. The great hindrance was entirely dis-

placed. The cause of their distressing anxiety no longer existed, and joy beyond all that they had dreamed awaited them. They came to the place of the dead, and they found immortals. They came in their grief to do offices of respect to a deceased friend, and angels met them with tidings that that friend was alive again. All their load of care and grief was rolled away.

And what Easter morning was to them, it is still to all who follow Jesus. It is a death-day to the tormenting distresses of human care and heart-oppressions. Believest thou the tidings that the crucified One is risen again from the dead? Why then afflict thyself any longer with thy bereavements, and with thy weaknesses? Does not thy friend and Saviour live? Hath he not shown himself stronger than all the powers of death and hell, and able to help thee with almighty strength? Is not all power given unto him in heaven and earth? Is he not with us always, even unto the end of the world? Matt. 28 : 18–20. And if thou verily believest this, what reasonable cause is there for thy sorrowful solicitude? We may be slow to realize the fact, but if we will only lift up our downcast eyes and look, we will see that the stone is rolled away, and that greater comfort is at hand than all we ever imagined.

The root and spring of all soul-sorrow now is unbelief and lack of faith. We either do not yet know the Easter facts, or we do not really credit them, or we could no longer go bowed down with grief and care. Assured that he is risen, that he

who loved us unto death is alive and near us with all the might of earth and heaven in his hands, that he hath borne our sins and griefs, and come out triumphant over death and hell, we either do not trust our ears, or every cause for painful anxiety is forever gone. Is he the Lord? Has he risen from the dead? Is he with us always with his investiture of almightiness? What then have we to fear? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Let the stone in thy way be what it may, and as great and ponderous as it may, it *is* rolled away in the resurrection of Jesus.

Art thou in the straits of poverty, compelled to toil day by day for thy scanty meals and poor subsistence, whilst others flourish in indolent luxury and ease? What matters it? If thou art honest in thy labor, and faithful in thy confidence in Jesus, thou hast infinite treasures in heaven. Thou art a son of God. Thou art heir to a kingdom over which death and hell have no more power. Thou hast an almighty Saviour. And he who keeps the sparrows, and clothes the flowers, is pledged and able to feed and clothe thee for the few years of thy earthly stay. *The stone is rolled away.*

Art thou a child of suffering, with consumption on thy lungs, or rheumatism in thy joints, or scrofula in thy blood, or mutilation in thy limbs, or disability in thy senses, or some other grief to mortify thy days? If thou art the friend of Jesus, his resurrection pledges everlasting restoration in his own good time, and gives meanwhile the guar-

antee that all these things shall work together for thy good. *The stone is rolled away.*

Art thou in sorrow of bereavement, deprived by death of the objects of thy love, severed from those with whom thy highest earthly life was bound, and left to sigh and weep over the graves of the dearest friends God ever gave thee? If thou truly believest these Easter tidings, the resurrection of thy Lord proves to thee that they are safe in him, and prophesies a sublimer bloom for those fallen flowers, and points to a blessed home of tearless love and joy for which thy Saviour is thus preparing thee, and to which he is able to bring thee. *The stone is rolled away.*

Or is thy sorrow rather one of soul? Art thou afraid of death and judgment? Doth thy conscience charge thee with remembrances of thy unworthiness and sins? Art thou troubled lest thy offences should at last exclude thee from God and his rest? Hast thou prayed, and sought, and wept at the footstool of mercy, and still found no consolation for thy burdened spirit? If thou really believest that Jesus thy Redeemer lives, thy guilt is cancelled, thy condemnation is past, thy peace with God is made. Open thy heart to these Easter tidings, and as thou hungerest and thirstest after righteousness thou shalt be satisfied. As truly as thy soul is knit to Christ by faith in his atoning death and resurrection power, neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor *any other creature*, shall be able to sepa-

rate thee from the love of God, or from the joys of his eternal kingdom. *The stone is rolled away.*

What is Easter?

II. *It is the setting up of a glorious refuge for assaulted and endangered faith.* It was an awful blow to the confidence and hopes of the first disciples to behold their Lord and Master seized, crucified, and slain. They had built themselves up in the fond belief that he was the chosen and sent of God to redeem Israel, to break the yoke of their oppressors, and to set up for them the predicted kingdom of peace. They had become thoroughly established in these glad anticipations. But now the object and centre of all these joyous ideas had fallen a victim to the malice of his foes, and the redemption for which they looked had not yet begun to be achieved. Darkness, perplexity, and confusion filled their hearts. They knew not what to make of it. Their hopes were confounded when they beheld their Master dead. Some of them had gone off, mortified and chagrined with disappointment, distressed at the thought of being so deceived, and unwilling any more to hear of the matter. These holy women, indeed, could not give up their affection, and some womanly instinct of a better outcome still lingered with them; but they too were under the clouds, and their faith was terribly eclipsed. But Easter morning brought again the daylight. A new world of hope broke on them with the tidings, "*He is risen.*" Bruised and expiring faith betook itself to that open sepul-

chre, and thrilled with new life and animation The women came, and were overwhelmed with the blessedness of the facts they learned. Confidence sprung up afresh, and overflooded their hearts with the grandeur of its reassurances. The doubting disciples came running to the spot, and went into the empty tomb, and "saw and believed." And the entire little band of despondents, as the Easter tidings entered their souls, found their confidence restored, their doubts solved, their hearts cheered, and all their endangered hopes revived, confirmed, and forever settled. Their faith had reached a city of refuge. *The stone was rolled away.*

And what Easter was to them it is to all who are willing to be convinced. If we have any doubts about the Divine Sonship of Jesus, or any questions about the truthfulness of Christianity, or any disheartening skepticism about the reality of Gospel blessings, it is because we have not done justice to the facts of the Christian Easter. The religion of the Gospel must forever stand or fall with the resurrection of Jesus. If he was not raised from the dead, then the Scriptures have not been fulfilled, then the inspiration of the Bible stands contradicted, then the whole doctrine of the Messiah vanishes into fiction, then is our preaching vain, and all our faith is vain. But if Jesus was raised from the dead, then was he the Son of God, then all his claims and professions and promises are true, then the work of salvation was a reality, then the prophets were inspired men, and

their words are the words of God, and all their blessed declarations concerning the Christ are steadfast, and all that is ventured upon Jesus in accordance with them is most certainly secure. The Christian Easter must, therefore, forever stand as the impregnable fortress of our faith. There is nothing in Christianity which does not there find shelter, entrenchment, and vindication. Betaking ourselves thither, all doubts give way, all misgivings vanish, and all the bruised and shattered fragments of failing confidence are restored, reanimated, and established forever. *The stone is rolled away.*

Dost thou doubt whether Jesus was the Christ? Go to his tomb, and settle it in thy soul how Almighty God could give such triumph to a man, slain because he professed himself to be the Christ, if he was not what he said he was. Take all the surroundings and facts of the case, and what other explanation is possible, save that which Christianity has always given, and which the first witnesses attested with their blood. Hear and weigh the story of the Jew, that his disciples stole the body, and falsely pretended that he had risen. Examine the varied contradictory theories of skepticism and pretended philosophy. Review all the suggestions of rationalism. And when thou hast searched out all of them to their deepest depths, lay them by the side of our simple Easter faith, and if there is any susceptibility for truthfulness and conviction left, thy doubts will disappear like mists before the rising sun. *The stone is rolled away.*

Dost thou question whether there is another life after this, or whether it is in the power of God to reconstruct and reanimate these fleshy tabernacles when once death has dissolved them? Go to the tomb of Jesus, behold its emptiness in spite of guards, and seals, and ponderous blockade, and tell by what other means his mangled and lifeless body got away, except by the powers of a life to which rocks, and bars, and wastes of fleshy organism are no hindrances. Learn the angelic tidings of a murdered Saviour risen, and moving in the majesty of angelic life, and thou wilt have no more trouble with the question, whether if a man die he shall live again. Easter settles it forever! *The stone is rolled away.*

Dost thou question whether it is safe to trust in a complete forgiveness in the merits and righteousness of Christ alone? Go to the sepulchre at Easter dawn; behold the surety of fallen man, on whom all the debt and sins of all men were laid, and who went into that rocky prison-house as the one who had voluntarily made himself responsible for all mortal deficiency; see him coming forth in life and glory with the angels, and how canst thou any longer doubt that the whole debt has been effectually cancelled? If he went there as thy substitute, and the law accepted and took hold of him as thy surety and in thy stead, how could the law ever let him go again if the claims and penalty of that law had not been discharged and exhausted to their last jot and tittle? If he died on thy account, that account must be settled, or he never

could have thus triumphantly been made alive again. Look at the facts, and reason it out as the Scriptures bid thee, and thou canst not fail to find in Easter day the full assurance that, as thou believest in Jesus, thou art forever justified and free! *The stone is rolled away.*

Dost thou hesitate to believe that Christ is now ever with and in his Church and Sacraments, there to dispense the blessings of his efficacious presence, to breathe his Spirit on men's souls, and to make them participants in his own life? Go to the sepulchre; see to what new powers even his slain and bruised humanity is raised; behold with what new laws his revived body is possessed; consider the angelic properties which now invest his glorified humanity; get a right conception of the new world and kingdom of being which it discloses; and how canst thou doubt of his capacity to do and fulfil all that his words declare, or that the Scriptures promise? In no direction can human faith be tried, but the Christian Easter comes to its effectual relief. It is the city of refuge for our perplexed and laboring hearts. Hope and confidence fly to it, and are securely fortified forever.

What is Easter?

III. *It is the stationing of loving angels round the grave, conducting to converse with the glorified.* When these holy women came to the sepulchre, "they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment." They were surprised and affrighted at the sight. But in full sympathy

with them he kindly said: "Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen: he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. Go tell the disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him as he said unto you." And again, Mary saw "two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." John 20: 11, 12. The beautiful and loving inhabitants of heaven had come about those gates of death. The dusky tomb was illumined with their radiance, and was made to echo their sympathizing words. Weeping love looked on them, and was comforted.

By nature we have no fellowship with heaven, and no communion with the dwellers there. Our sins have sundered us from that bright and happy world, and the evidences of this estrangement are manifest in the needless dread and fear men feel at the presence of these celestial messengers. But it is the office of Jesus to bring us and angels together again. By him they are brought down to earth, and by fellowship with him we come into fellowship with them. These friends of Jesus found them at hand in the hour of their grief and sorrow to comfort them with their presence as they looked into the tomb, making it light with their heavenly glory, charming away its horrors by their comforting assurances, and telling them where to meet their risen and glorified Lord.

Nature is horrified at the idea of death. It is the common instinct of our being to dislike to hear

of a dying day. There is nothing so disturbing to our hearts as to think of bidding adieu to light, and life, and friends, and home, to lie down in the dark, damp, and solitary tomb. But Easter has put an angel of God in every sepulchre. It has stationed a heavenly comforter at the mouth of every grave. Since Jesus has lain there, celestial orders are to be found at its head and at its foot. A higher and a better world there joins upon this life of sorrow and of tears. As the friends of Jesus come thither with spices of love in their hands, they come into the communion of the glorified, and begin to have converse with angelic excellence. It is the gateway to a sublimer, holier, higher life. Immortal spirits meet the weary pilgrim there. Heaven borders on the tomb. Beyond is the land of resurrection and blessed immortality. Stooping to look into the sepulchre, we already see the white-robed dwellers in another sphere, and catch the glancing of their bright array, and hear the words of triumph on their tongues. Entering that dark passage-way, we are upon the margin of the celestial world, close to the heavenly city, adjoining the "innumerable company of angels." A little beyond are the pearly gates, the golden streets, and the light which never dims. Another step, and the "loud uplifted angel trumpets" bid us welcome to the mansions of the everlasting home.

O beautiful, blessed, glorious Easter, which brings to mortal men such comforting things as

these! Flowers in all their loveliness, music in all its exciting charms, eloquence in all its magic potency, are flat and empty when set as expressions of its treasures. What ponderous weights of sorrow it rolls from believing hearts! What an everlasting refuge and fortress it furnishes for our oft-fainting faith! And then the loving angels it stations round our death-beds and in our graves! And the glories of resurrection life and almightiness it assigns to our gracious Saviour! And the transformations it works in the dreaded humiliation of the tomb, making it a heaven-illumined passage-way to undying blessedness! How shall we set forth all its preciousness! How shall we take in its fulness of joy!

JESUS LIVES! no longer now
Can thy terrors, Death, appall me;
Jesus lives! and this I know,
From the grave He will recall me!
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

JESUS LIVES! to Him the throne
High o'er earth and heaven is given;
I shall go where he is gone,
Live and reign with him in heaven.
God is pledged; weak doubtings, hence!
This shall be my confidence.

JESUS LIVES! I know full well,
Nought me from His love shall sever;
Life, nor death, nor powers of hell,
Part me now from Christ forever.
Freely God doth grace dispense;
This shall be my confidence.

EASTER MONDAY.

Luke 24 : 13–35. And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

THESE words are connected with one of the most beautiful incidents in New Testament history. There is but a single record of it in the Scriptures, but it is a blessed and comforting record, full of naturalness, interest, pathos, and instruction. It has been much preached about, but it is ever fresh; and the variety of topics which it suggests is almost exhaustless. All of Christian life, and Christian doctrine, seem to cluster around it. The Old Testament with all its prophecies, and the New Testament with all its consolations; faith with all its trials, and hope with all its fears and triumphs; discipleship in its burdens of soul and heart-questionings, and in its illuminating converse and glad experiences; the feebleness of earthly nature, and the heavenly strength which accompanies it; the treasures which may come from civility to strangers, and the happiness of taking people who can teach us into our houses;—all are beautifully introduced in connection with this evening walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

I. NOTICE THE CHARACTERS BROUGHT TO VIEW.

Two men appear. The name of one of them was Cleopas. Of his history we know nothing further. The name of the other is not given, nor

anything more by which we can certainly identify him. Neither of them, however, belonged to the college of apostles; for when they returned to Jerusalem "they found the eleven gathered together." They were, therefore, not of the eleven.

They were devout Jews. They had been to the holy city observing the Passover, as commanded by Moses. They had remained in quietness during the Sabbath. They kept the law. Judaism was the first great step to Christianity. All the first disciples of Christ were Jews. The Apostles were Jews. Jesus himself was a Jew. And it is through the Jews that salvation has come. There could be no Christianity without Judaism. Moses prepared the way for Christ. It was by the institutes and observances established by him, that the world was trained for the coming and acceptance of the Messiah. Even to this day, we can have no right idea of the Christ, without going back to Judah's sacred books, and approaching and expounding the New Testament through the Old. "The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Gal. 3 : 24. And to this end had it served these men.

They were "disciples;" that is, of Jesus. They had been taught to look for the coming Christ, and they did look, and they saw. How they first came into contact with the Saviour, we know not. It was, perhaps, with them, as with many others. They had heard John the Baptist preach, and had had their attention directed to Jesus by his testi-

mony. Improvement of what light and privileges we have, always results in superior attainments. Pursuing the information they possessed, they had been brought to Jesus, and become attendants upon his instructions, witnesses of his miracles, and believers in him as the promised Messiah.

They were in great perplexity and trouble of heart. Their faith had received a blow under which it greatly staggered. He whom they had taken as their Lord had been crucified and slain. That Prophet, mighty in word and deed before God and all the people, and in whom they had fondly trusted as the Redeemer of Israel, had fallen a victim to the malice of his foes, and been ignominiously put to death. All their hopes had been thrown into confusion, and their souls were filled with gloomy doubts.

They reasoned the case with each other; but reason was too weak an instrument to give them relief. Mere earthly reason, when it comes to matters of faith and salvation, can do very little for us. It may serve to set us in controversy with each other, and bring on all sorts of disturbing debate, as in this instance; but it can give us no satisfactory light, and no peace of mind.

They were moving through one of the most interesting and beautiful districts. Their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus lay by the tombs of the ancient Judges, by the old dwelling-place of Samuel, and through mountainous scenery as attractive as any in the Holy Land. But no charms

of nature, however intermingled with sacred story, could soothe the trouble that was upon their souls. Those scenes of blood and murder which had been enacted at Jerusalem, and the sore disappointment which those scenes had entailed upon their most precious hopes, followed them, and clung to them, in spite of all the pleasant things around them. Nature, in all its loveliness, cannot supply the place of Christ, or give comfort to the soul that has lost him.

They had heard of the resurrection of Christ, but even those precious tidings only added to their astonishment, and bewildered their minds the more. They had been told of the angels the women saw at the tomb, and of the words they uttered, that the crucified Jesus was alive again. But they had not yet come to faith in that fact, nor into a right comprehension of its meaning; and it only made their perplexities the worse. The first presentations of Christianity to an awakened soul are full of difficulties. Even the most precious things are those which give the most trouble. The mind does not know what to make of them. It cannot exactly disbelieve them, and it cannot exactly receive them. Everything appears right and conclusive up to a certain point, and everything beyond that seems to destroy again what was thought established and clear. And those very things in which the only relief and comfort can be found are of such an extraordinary character, that faith is afraid to accept them. We can readily ascertain our need of a Saviour,

and we can also be persuaded that Jesus is a wonderful prophet and worker of wonders. But when it comes to the point of believing that he is *our* Saviour, that he has actually paid *our* debt, redeemed *us* from the curse of the law, and completed forever the whole transaction of *our* deliverance; we hesitate; we are afraid to believe it; and we go walking in sorrow, with loads of unsolved questions burdening down our souls.

The Saviour was with these sorrowing pilgrims, unknown to themselves. As they were conversing together, and discussing these beclouded and beclouding events, "Jesus himself drew near, and journeyed with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him." In the form of a common traveller, journeying the same way, and after the same manner with themselves, he overtook them, and made one in their little company. There are many ways in which he comes to his people. He comes to them sometimes in the form of a plain gardener, or a servant. He comes sometimes in the form of a fellow-traveller. He comes sometimes in the form of a poor beggar. But, in some shape or other, he is never far from those who are in spiritual earnest, and devoutly struggling for the light.

In our earthly way of looking at things, we do not always recognize the presence of our Saviour, and our eyes are holden that we do not know him. When that minister spoke to us words which stirred our souls, and made us see ourselves, our wants and our Saviour, as we never saw them

before, we thought we were listening to a mere man. We did not once suspect that it was Jesus who was thus addressing us. That stranger, whom we accidentally met in a stage-coach, or at the table of a friend, or in the carriage at a funeral, or in our country rambles, who told us things of God, and the soul, and salvation which we had not before considered, we took to be an erring fellow mortal. Never once did we suspicion that it was Jesus himself conducting the conversation. That poor child of suffering at whose side in the sick-chamber we sat, and looked, and wondered, till our hearts softened, and our thoughts were warmly drawn out on topics which we never so realized till then, we took to be only a frail human being, laboring with disease and death. We did not even dream that it was Jesus addressing himself to us for our better instruction, and our improvement in saving wisdom. That beggar by the wayside, who stretched out to us her skeleton hand for a few pennies to relieve her misery, moving our sympathies, and giving her grateful benedictions for the spare shilling put into her hand, we took to be a mere wretched specimen of human ill fortune. We never thought that it was the dear Saviour endeavoring to bring us into blessed communion with himself. But, in all such varied forms, does the crucified but risen Lord appear now to his tried disciples, to draw them out, and exercise their hearts, and build up their faith, and gain ingress for his heavenly consolations into their troubled and anxious souls.

It is the fault of our feeble faith, that we only think of Christ as far away—as hidden in the grave—or in some remote world to which the grave is the mysterious doorway. Hence so much of our trouble and doubtfulness. But it is an erroneous way of thinking of him. He is not in the grave. He is not far off in some realm which separates him forever from all connection with this present world. He is risen. He is not far from every one of us. Wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is. He is in the city, and he is in the country. He is in the garden among the flowers, and he is in the dusty highway. He is in our assemblies for devotion, and he journeys with us in our travels. He comes to us in our Sunday mornings, and joins us in our Sunday evenings. He is with us, and speaking to us, even when we do not at all suspect that it is he.

> Not in the grave, not in the grave, O man,
> Believe thy Saviour now to be;
> But in the lonely hour,
> And in the evening walk,
> Think that he companies thy solitude.

II. NOTICE HOW THE RISEN JESUS DEALS WITH THESE PERPLEXED AND SORROWING ONES.

1. He "drew near, and went with them." It is the will of our gracious Saviour to be near us, and to have us near him. Two things particularly seem to have drawn him into the company of these disciples. They were filled with real soul-trouble.

They were earnest, honest, and devout men, sincere in their faith, but now in distressing confusion of mind from which they could not extricate themselves. This attracted interest.

"We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Heb. 4:15. When grief and trouble are upon his disciples, he takes it to heart, and is drawn toward them in loving sympathy. When great gloom and sorrow come over us, we may be sure that he is not far off. In the ongoing of his great plans, it cannot be, but that clouds and pains will often come upon the most earnest and devout of men. But when those clouds and trials come, he also draws near, and walks with us. Affliction never enters our circles, but he enters with it, or follows close upon it. And when we are most hopelessly overwhelmed, then he is the nearest. We may not know him, in the forms in which he comes, but we may be sure that he is at hand, that our sorrows are considered, and that what our necessities require he will supply.

But, in addition to their mental troubles, these pilgrims were earnestly engaged with each other trying to solve and master them. They were talking together about the things which had happened, and were communing and reasoning with each other over them. Earnestness of spirit is never unnoticed in heaven. Mutual consultation and honest effort to solve the problems which hinder and obscure our comfort and our faith, are never without Divine aid. People who have not

interest enough to talk about Jesus, are not likely to have Jesus come very near them. But where there is solemn concern about him, and earnest exchange of thoughts and views to come to a right conclusion respecting him, and warm communing one with another as to what is to be thought and done, thither Jesus is attracted, and there we may be sure that he is near. If we come together with hearts anxious to know the truth, and solemnly purposed to learn of each other all we can, and moved in spirit to ascertain the saving faith, we shall never fail to find Jesus in the company, although we may not know him at the time. In some form or other he will be near, and visible, and ready to help us to the solution of our doubts.

2. He questioned them as to their troubles and sadness. "He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk? and why are ye sad?" His inquiries are put in the character of a stranger; but, in substance, they convey an expression of the Lord. It was a call to review the character of their trouble, as the basis for the formation of a better judgment. They had not looked at matters rightly. They had not estimated them in their proper light. They had not gone deep enough into the facts for the proper conclusions. The cure for their disturbance was in the very things that disturbed them, if they would only learn to see them in their true aspects and relations. Poor human nature worries itself with

many things which ought to be its highest comfort; and is troubled with what should give it peace; and is sad and perplexed with what is freighted with the sublimest consolation. Jesus dies, and their confidence dies with him. Jesus rises from the dead, and their staggered hope transmutes the glorious tidings into an instrument of still greater stumbling. Let disturbed and desponding souls go back, and reconsider what it is that distresses and disheartens them. Let them look again, and see whether there is really reason for all this perturbed feeling, and this leaden sadness.

Did Christian people but view their anxieties aright, they would find in them cause for joy rather than discomfiture. In the worst that ever happens to them, they will yet have to pronounce against themselves as fools, and slow of heart, to have allowed themselves to regard any of it as other than blessed, necessary, and good. Be their situation what it may, let them fairly answer the Saviour's question, why they are so sad? and they will already be far on the way to have that sadness banished forever. Desponding soul, Jesus asks thee, Why art thou sad? Canst thou give him a reason for thy disheartenment at what has happened? Review thy ground, and come to a better mind.

3. Having drawn out their story, he directed them to the Bible. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." After

all, there is nothing that can so settle, satisfy, and comfort our troubled hearts and anxious doubts, as the records of the holy prophets. There the portrait of the Christ is fully drawn, and all that concerneth him is amply disclosed. From them these disciples might have fortified themselves against all such sorrowful perplexities over their Master's death. The very first promise that was made of him, told of a suffering as well as a triumphing Saviour. He was to be bruised, as well as to bruise. All the appointments of the Law pointed to death and bloodshedding, as the only possible way of remission of sins, or recovery from condemnation. All the types which prefigured him, showed that he was to be a bearer of sin and shame. Isaiah had spoken of chastisement, stripes, smiting, and the making of his soul an offering for sin. The Psalmist had prophesied of reproach, of smiting, of spitting, of betrayal by his familiar friend, and of his being compassed about by all the powers of hell. And from one end of the Scriptures to the other, suffering, shame, and death were inseparably linked with the Messianic work. To all these the mysterious stranger pointed, and put it to the consciences of these perplexed pilgrims whether it could be otherwise than that the Christ should suffer these things, and through them enter upon his glory. O it was a fruitful text, a sublime preacher, and a mighty sermon! We know not what words were used, but we do know that they made the hearts of the hearers burn within them, and threw a light

and power into their souls which charmed away their gloom and doubt beyond all that they supposed to be possible.

Precious, indeed, are these blessed Scriptures Herein is light which giveth understanding to the simple, and which maketh wise unto salvation. Herein is balm for the troubled heart more than Gilead can furnish. Are we shaken in faith, and disturbed in our hopes? Jesus directs us to the Bible. Are we oppressed with doubts which reason cannot solve, or ready to falter in our discipleship? Jesus bids us look to what the prophets of God have spoken. Are we perplexed, befogged, and ready to let go our confidence? The risen Lord points out the remedy in the holy oracles of heaven. Search the Scriptures, learn their testimony, take in their revelations, direct your conclusions and your course by what they present, and what was dark will soon grow plain, and what was doubtful will become settled, luminous, and sure.

4. And having set them right in their reading of the Scriptures, the Saviour yielded to their entreaties, entered with them into their home, and made himself known to them in the breaking of bread. They supposed that they were conversing with a stranger; but they had been so profited and comforted by his words, that they desired more of his company, and insisted that he should accept of their hospitality. Those who love the truth will be kindly disposed toward those who teach it; and those who admit Christ

into their hearts, will be anxious also to have him abide in their homes. And those who in grateful consideration of his kindness receive him into their houses, though they should not yet know with whom they are dealing, will soon have him disclosed to them in all the certainties of an unmistakable faith. It is a great thing to have Christ fall in with us by the way. It is a great thing to tell him our troubles, and to listen to his heart-warming words. But it is a greater thing to entreat him to abide with us in our dwellings, and to sit down with us at our meals. Where he is earnestly invited, there he will go; and there he will give his blessing to our bread, and show himself our true and everliving Lord. Walking with Christ, and listening to Christ, we are on the way to dwell with Christ, and to have our eyes opened to see and know him as our almighty Saviour, and our glorified Redeemer-King.

Friends and brethren, how is it then with you? We are all on our journey home. Many also are the sorrows and anxieties that weigh upon our hearts. Often are we perplexed, and full of disappointment and sadness. Our faith is frequently sorely tried, and the questionings of our souls abound with anguish and unwilling misgivings. There is but One who is able to help us. Unknown to many he has long been following after us, and come to our side in loving sympathy with our sad estate. Often, and much, and in many forms, has he spoken to us, and inquired of our griefs, and proposed to us the remedy. To many

of us the day is far spent, and the evening of life is drawing on. The shadows for some have already begun to fall, and the night is at hand. The question shall soon be settled whether our final home is to be with Jesus, or without him. And what if that night should come upon us without Christ! What if we should have to enter those final homes and not have him with us! What if he should pass us by, and leave us to everlasting sadness and despair! His voice still is sounding in our ears. He is yet within our reach. He may now be entreated by our supplications to come in to us and to abide with us. Have you then invited him to your hearts and your homes? Have you asked him to abide with you over the approaching night, which can never know a morning without him? Has he not said and done enough for you already to deserve this at your hands? O thou pilgrim to the tomb, constrain him to abide with thee! Suffer not such a friend and comforter to pass thee by. Ask him into thy poor sorrowing heart, and thy humble house. He will leave thee if thou entreat him not to stay. Let thy earnest prayer, then, go up to him at once, that he may abide with thee. Constrain him, and he will come in, and thou shalt know him, and thy dwelling shall glow with his blessing, and thy soul shall see thy risen Lord.

Jesus, Master,

> Abide with me. Fast falls the eventide;
> The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

JOHN 20 : 19–31. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you : as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them : then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book : but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

TO confirm our faith, and to establish us in it unto eternal salvation, is the intent of the Gospel for this morning. Not all the wonders which Christ did have been recorded. Were all fully described, the world itself could hardly contain the books. Only sam-

ples are given. But what has been written, and especially what we find in these verses, is written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing we might have life through his name.

Admirably adapted also to effect this end are the particulars here recounted. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how any honest mind can take the facts as they stand, and yet not believe the reality of Christ's marvellous resurrection, and with it the divinity of the entire Christian system.

I. Notice the skepticism which at first had possession of the disciples themselves.

The crucifixion and death of their Master had so crushed and destroyed all their earlier hopes, and induced a state of mind in which they were very slow to accept any further reports concerning him. When Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women came to them, and told how they had seen a vision of angels at the empty sepulchre, who had declared that Jesus had risen, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." Luke 24 : 11. Even after two of their own fellowship, who had conversed with him in that marvellous interview on the way to Emmaus, came and told what they had seen and heard, "neither believed they them." Mark 16 : 13. Nay, when Jesus himself appeared to them, and "stood in the midst of them," they were hardly willing to believe their own senses, but "were terrified and

affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." Luke 25 : 36–41.

And when most of them were finally overpowered by the accumulated weight of evidence, and were persuaded that their Master was really alive from the dead, Thomas still persisted in refusing to believe it, till by feeling the rents in the Saviour's hands and side, he should have the highest possible degree of proof. All that the women had said, all that the two brought back from Emmaus, and all that the united testimony of the ten together affirmed, could not make the least impression on him. "He said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

It must be admitted that Thomas here set up very extreme and unjustifiable conditions. The standard of evidence he required was censurably high and unreasonable. To demand to see before believing, and to have everything demonstrated before yielding assent, if carried out into practical life, would undo society and destroy the world. What would be the result if the wife could have no confidence in her husband, the husband in his wife, the child in its parents, the friend in his friend, beyond what is unmistakably manifest? What would become of trade, commerce, and human intercourse in general, if confidence had no other basis than sight, or no existence except in what is fully demonstrated? How could the affairs of mankind, and human interest, and neces-

sity go on, if the husbandman would never put his hand to the plough until made sure that there could be no failure in his crop, and the seaman never spread sail till certified that no storm or disaster would send him to the bottom of the ocean, and all enterprises and trusts delay until success should be proven beyond all peradventures? Necessity is upon us; we must take things on trust. There must be confidence in one another, and willingness to believe beyond what we can see, and touch, and handle for ourselves.

On all ordinary and just principles, Thomas should have been satisfied by the testimony of his friends. The law holds one credible witness sufficient to command belief, and two or three, provided they concur, are supposed in the laws of both God and man to be sufficient to render any fact amply certain for all practical purposes. But here were ten men, all well known to Thomas, and sundry women besides, who were not strangers to him, all testifying from their own certain knowledge, that Jesus was alive again from the dead; yet he refused to believe them, and proposed his own eyes and fingers as the only witnesses whom he would credit. He would trust no man's senses, nor the senses of any number of men and women, however trustworthy or favorably known. He must see for himself, and experiment for himself, or he would not believe.

But all this reluctance to credit what was affirmed, and even the unreasonableness of Thomas, is exceedingly valuable to us in the chain of evi-

dence that the resurrection was not a myth. Had they yielded an easy assent, and taken the thing from the start as a mere matter of course, there might be some little room to hesitate about the truth of their testimony. But they were in no hurry to accept a thing so astonishing and unlikely. They were so incredulous in the matter as to incur the severe rebuke of Christ himself for "their unbelief and hardness of heart." Mark 16 : 14. And when we find their most obstinate doubts vanquished, and even their most unreasonable demands so far met as to put to flight forever the least and last remains of any question or misgiving, we may rest perfectly assured that they were not deceived, and that all that they have told us is certainly the truth.

II. Compare the manner in which they first received the report of the Saviour's resurrection with that in which they afterward affirmed and maintained it.

At the time to which the text refers they were full of conflicting emotions, disappointment, perplexity, and fear. We here behold them shyly and sadly hid away, like frightened deer, timid, and hardly willing to speak to any one, or to believe anything.

To their dismay over what had befallen their Master, and their unmanning self-reproaches in having believed so confidently in one who had so completely failed to fulfil their expectations, there was added a terrible dread lest they should be

dealt with in the same manner as Jesus had been. They would not so much as be seen in public, but crept away into a private place, and kept the doors locked behind them, and were loath to hear anything further about their Master.

But before fifty days had passed we find them in a very different mood, and pervaded with a very different spirit. They were now no longer afraid to show themselves, or under any hesitation to speak out, even in the face of the bloody men whom they before so much dreaded. We now find them standing up, and charging it into the teeth of the Jews, that they, with wicked hands, had crucified and slain the Lord of Glory, whom God had raised up again from the dead, and made both Lord and Christ. Acts 2 : 23–36. No threats, or doubts, or fears could now silence them, or drive them from the bold and defiant assertion to every one and everywhere that the murdered Jesus was alive again, and that he is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. And when the rulers, and elders, and scribes, and priests laid hold on them, and commanded them under the severest penalties not to speak at all, or teach in the name of Jesus, we find them protesting in the face of martyrdom itself that they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard. Acts 4 : 1–20.

Whence now was this change? How came men so timid, doubtful, and dismayed to be, in so short a time, so confident, so courageous, and so fearless? How did it happen that they were to a man

now prepared to seal with their blood what some of them were not willing to believe on the word of any number of men and women on earth? Must there not have happened something very extraordinary in this brief interval to have wrought so wonderful a revolution? What was it then that transformed these timorous, fleeing, helpless, and dismayed men, locking themselves up in secret for fear of the Jews, and not willing even to believe each other in their trepidation; and that advanced them so suddenly to an elevation of fearlessness and courage to withstand Israel's priests and judges and all the exasperated murderers of Jesus, and to affirm his resurrection and Lordship, regardless of all that man could do unto them? In the nature of things it could have been nothing less than what these men themselves attest as having occurred meanwhile. Such inflexible zeal, and intrepidity, and undoubting confidence could not have been wrought into such timid, and dismayed, and mortified doubters by anything less than the veritable, repeated, and unmistakable reappearance of their Master to them, and the verification of his resurrection by signs and tokens which it would be the height of all unreason and sin not to believe. What could have dislodged such doubts as Thomas had, or met such demands as he insisted on, and made of him a herald and a hero of faith in what he had been so unwilling to credit, but just such tangible proofs as those detailed in this day's Gospel?

If, then, there is anything in the world that de-

serves to be credited, it is the testimony of the apostles respecting the resurrection of Jesus, and hence his divine Sonship, unmistakable Messiahship, and indisputable right to our faith, obedience, and love. Verily, "these things are written" not only with the intent, but freighted also with all the requisite material, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

III. Notice also the high characteristics of Christ in his resurrection glory, as evidenced to the disciples in the instances before us.

It was not as a mere ghostly apparition that the Saviour came again to them after his death. It was in corporeal reality. That which stood before them was the same body which had been wounded on the cross, and which had lain dead in the tomb. The sepulchre was searched, but not a particle of the body which was put there remained. It had taken life again, and quite disappeared from the place. A literal resurrection had occurred. That which died, and was dead, was made alive again, bearing with it all the marks of its recent slaughter. Those marks the disciples saw and recognized. Jesus "showed unto them his hands and his side." He even challenged Thomas to present his finger, and test the prints of the nails in his hands, and to reach forth his hand and put it into the rent in his side. And when at first they were inclined to believe that it was only some ghostly being that they beheld, he demanded of them,

saying, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me to have." Luke 24 : 39.

Nor did the apostles fail to apply the proposed test. John, at any rate, testifies that he had not only heard him, but seen him with his eyes, and looked upon him, and handled him with his hands, not only in his earthly life, but as "the Word of life," *the living Logos*, in which capacity he could not have been spoken of except as recovered from the power of death. 1 John 1 : 1–13.

But whilst Christ presented himself after his resurrection in the same body which died, it was with new and higher attributes. It had now come into the possession of spiritual and heavenly qualities, which quite exempted it from all ordinary physical laws. He now could come into a room, the doors of which were carefully locked, no longer hindered by what would obstruct the passage of earthly bodies. He now could appear and disappear, be known to them or unknown, in a way even more exalted than he had once walked on the sea, or was lifted up in the hour of his transfiguration on the mount. He could eat, and speak, and let himself be touched, and at the same time evanish as mysteriously as he had become manifest to them. He wore the same body, but it was no longer "a natural body," no longer capable of being harmed or confined by earthly power, but heavenly, immortal, and forever independent of the necessities and limitations of earthly life.

Thomas could feel his hands and his side, but he could not hold those hands, or follow those spiritual motions. The whole being was now transformed, exalted, glorified, and made conformable to the heavenly, the spiritual, and the undying. The seeds and beginnings of all this were in him before, but hidden, overlaid, and conditioned for the most part by the earthly; but now the inner had asserted itself through and over all the elements of the outward, and transformed them to its own celestial nature and qualities. Henceforward he was a priest forever, not "after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." Heb. 7 : 16.

He presented himself further as the source and author of peace. It was not a mere empty salutation which he uttered when he said, as here three times repeated, "*Peace be unto you.*" Christ does not give his salaam "as the world giveth." John 14 : 27. And now that he had overcome death, exhausted the penalty of sin in his own body on the tree, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, there is something peculiarly emphatic in the salutation which he brings. It looked back upon what had occurred, and summed up the result, and proposed to his disciples the full benefit of the whole. It was an assurance direct from the vanquisher of death and hell that the work was effectually done, and the presentation by the great hero himself of the whole fruit of it to those who had acknowledged him as the Messiah, and were now ready to believe in his glorious triumph

Nay, it was the word of evangelic absolution for every one of us—the word of peace from the gracious Author of peace, declaring his reconciliation, and the complete and everlasting blotting out by his death of all condemnation, if we do now but recognize and accept him as our Lord and salvation.

Still further, "he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained." He thus asserted for himself the sublimest powers of a perfect Prince and Saviour, having at his disposal now both the energies of the Holy Ghost and the prerogatives of absolute sovereignty over the penalties of sin and the souls of men. It was a divine and awful appropriation to himself; but such was an essential feature of that resurrection glory in which he presented himself to the recognition and faith of his people, and still presents himself.

Nay, more still, he accepted and appropriated, in all its wonderful fulness, the devout exclamation of Thomas, and pronounced a glorious benediction for all men who may be able to unite in the same confession. This exclamation was not a profane outburst of surprise, or the idle utterance of one simply overwhelmed with astonishment. It was the language of profound devotion and adoring faith. When this obstinate skeptic broke out, "and said unto him, My Lord and my God!" he meant to express that he did now be-

lieve that his Master was risen from the dead, and that he must now and forever regard him with infinite gratitude for his forbearance and compassion toward so grievous and unreasonable an unbeliever, and as nothing less than the adorable Lord and God himself. And Christ accepted that confession, and signified at once the blessedness of Thomas in coming to so full a faith, and the blessedness of all who shall learn to believe as he did. The method which the Saviour adopted in his approach to the unbelieving Thomas itself proved to him that the Lord was conscious of all the extravagant and unreasonable things which he had been saying, and of all the thoughts that were working in his heart. That "Thomas, reach hither thy finger," in its lowly simplicity, disclosed to him the presence of omniscience as condescending and gracious as it was divine. There was no escape from it. Doubt vanished before it as darkness before the sun. And he now saw in the risen Christ, what that Jesus claimed to be, his Lord and his God.

Such, then, are the characteristics in which Jesus, after his resurrection, presented himself to his disciples. We sometimes wish that we had lived in those days, and been made the eyewitnesses of these wonders. Men sigh under the incertitude and dimness of a life of mere faith, and think how much more satisfied and happy they would be had they been privileged to see the Saviour in his resurrection glory, or to walk the shores of Galilee with him, or to sit down with

him on the hillside of the holy land, or to hear those words of his from his own gracious lips! People think that they would then have been free from the uncertainties and misgivings which now so much trouble them. But what advantages had the first disciples more than we? By the unerring guidance of the Holy Ghost, and by command of the Master himself, they have given us specimens of all that they had to convince, satisfy, and settle their minds. They have told us how they doubted, and how their doubts were removed. We are as capable of judging of the propriety and truthfulness of their conclusions as they themselves were. We have the same facts, the same Spirit, and the same means, apart from the testimony of our own senses, which they had. But we can see through their eyes, and hear through their ears, and feel through their hands and touch, just as really as they did themselves. And if things were so conclusive and unmistakable to them, there is every reason why they should be equally so to us. Their privileges were not personal to themselves in such sense that they are not also for all the Church in all ages. They were made to see and realize what they did, not only on their own account, but for ours as well. What they saw, they saw for us also. Christ showed himself to them in all these wonders and graces, that all men through them might see the same, and have their doubts removed, their hearts assured, and their adoring faith established. They beheld for us, and they wrote by inspiration of

God for us; and the signs which Jesus did in their presence are written that we with them, and on the basis of the same facts, might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might also have life through his name. And if they were refreshed and gladdened by what they saw, and were blessed in believing, the same comfort, joy, and peace are proposed to us through their word. Because they saw, they believed. But there may be a faith as true and as unclouded as theirs without seeing, and one in every respect as blessed. Nay, so is the word of the Saviour himself: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Friends and brethren, let us not miss the blessing of our privileges by an envious or disheartening exaggeration of those which the first disciples enjoyed. Let us not go home unprofited by this morning's comforting lessons, because we were not actors in the scenes they recount. The great fact of our Saviour's resurrection stands before us attested beyond all possibility of mistake. We behold him this day in the glory of his resurrection life. He stands before us new-risen from the dead, and shows us his wounds yet fresh endured for us. He approaches every one of us with the words of gracious salutation on his lips, and proposes to our oft-troubled hearts his everlasting peace. Even now he is breathing upon us, and bidding us receive the Holy Ghost. His hands are spread open to us for our inspection, and his

tender entreaty to each of us is, "Be not faithless, but believing."

O ye Peters who have denied him, and whose hearts are burdened with the sorrowful recollection, behold how graciously he comes to you again, and seeks to comfort you with his forgiveness, and to prove to you his undying love! He comes to assure you of his success in atoning for all your cowardice and wickedness, and to offer to you once more his joyous favor. "Peace be unto you," is the word he brings. Only take it, "and be not faithless, but believing."

O ye Jameses, and Judes, and Johns, and Matthews, who have oft-refused to credit what the true ministers of God have declared, and who have been so "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," let your eyes be opened, and see who it is that is before you, and know that it is he in whom all the Scriptures have been fulfilled! "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" Is it not your risen Lord himself? And does he not come to you with tidings of victory, of reconciliation, and of peace? Hear his salutation, and behold his hands and side, "and be not faithless, but believing."

O ye Thomases, whose rash speeches are all treasured in his memory, and whose unreasonable unbelief has not escaped the notice of his omniscient eye, reach out your fingers and try the nail-prints, and your hands and probe the gash the spear has made, and satisfy yourselves this day

that it is verily your Lord and God! Let your souls be mortified at your wrong to your brethren, yourselves, and your gracious Saviour. Confess your error and your unreasonableness, and adore the grace that has not left you to perish in your folly. Honest as you may have been in your doubts and hardness, acknowledge your wrong, and let it be seen and known that henceforward your hearts and souls shall have no higher pleasure than in the adoring confession of Jesus, "and be not faithless, but believing."

And to all of us, now and forever, be the blessedness of those who, not having seen, yet do believe!

And "unto him that loves us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Rev. 1 : 5, 6.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

John 10 : 11–16. I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth : and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father : and I lay down my life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

E have seen something of the preciousness of Christ in his presentation of himself to his disciples after his resurrection. The Gospel for this morning, if possible, opens up to us still greater attractiveness and spiritual consolation. He here pictures to us his character, work, office, and relation to his people, under a figure which has deeply affected the Christian heart in all ages, and which is universally admitted to be one of the most beautiful, as it is one of the most familiar images in all the holy Scriptures. And the intense tenderness, mingled with sublimest dignity which pervades the description, has lent a tinge of particular interest to the day to which its consideration has been assigned, and led a great part of Western Christendom to refer to it as "The Sunday of the Good Shepherd."

And though the Saviour took to himself this

title before his crucifixion, and with reference to his death for his sheep, it connects equally with his resurrection and his exaltation to glory. The Epistle for the day speaks of it as a *present* office of our blessed Lord, and reminds Christians how they were once as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ as even now "that great Shepherd of the sheep," whom "the God of peace brought again from the dead." Heb. 13 : 20.

Two aspects of the subject present themselves for our consideration. *First*, The characteristics of Christ with reference to his people. *Second*, The characteristics of his people with reference to Christ. May God aid and bless us in our meditations upon them.

The title of Shepherd is one of great antiquity, and one of great honor. The first martyr was a shepherd. All the patriarchs were shepherds. The confession of the sons of Jacob to the king of Egypt was, "Thy servants are shepherds." Moses, the sublimest historian and lawgiver of the world, was a shepherd. David, the poet-king of Israel, the founder of the Hebrew monarchy, and the central figure in the history of the sacred people, was a keeper of his father's flocks, and thought it no derogation from the glory of the great Jehovah to sing of him as "the Shepherd of Israel." Nay, the Almighty himself does not hesitate to accept and appropriate the designation. "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will

both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. . . . I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." Ez. 34 : 11–16.

Thus from the ancient times the most honorable and blessed offices were likened to that of a shepherd, and especially the dignity and excellence of him in whom all offices centred, and all types and prophecies are fulfilled. Even from heaven the promise came, "I will save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey, and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it." Ez. 34 : 22–24.

In taking to himself this title the blessed Saviour would therefore have us see in him a being of great dignity, personal excellence, and princely authority. But it implies much more than this. Mere greatness and power are rather repellant than attractive. Majesty and honor may awe and terrify, but of themselves beget no bond of loving confidence and peaceful sympathy. We

may be convinced that Jesus is Lord and God, and be filled with reverence and adoration; but we need more than this to put us at ease in our contemplations of him. And it is just this requirement that his character as Shepherd was meant to meet.

It is a title of most intimate connection, familiarity, and sympathy. This is not at once so manifest until we become acquainted with pastoral life and duty in the ancient world. Here we know very little about shepherds, and what we do know falls very far short of what the description would suggest to an Oriental mind. Here the connection between the shepherd and the sheep is one of distance and mere pecuniary interest. It was very different in the regions and times in which this title obtained its high significance. In Palestine particularly, and even to this day, there is between the shepherd and his flock the closest union of attachment and tenderness. It is a country of intense ruggedness, and many consequent dangers from torrents, robbers, and wild beasts. The shepherd can never leave his flock. He lives with his sheep by day, and he sleeps near them by night. His eye is ever on them, and he becomes as familiar to them as one of themselves. He is continually incurring personal risks and inconveniences for them. He learns to love them, and to feel that his interests and theirs are the same. The hazards and hardships of the flock are shared by him. His chief study is their safety and comfort. When they suffer or are in want, he takes it upon him-

self, and is never happier than when he sees them satisfied and in peace. Their danger is his danger, and their lot is his lot. Nay, so close and sympathetic is the union between them, that their feeling is what he most feels, and his will is their will. Indeed, he and they are but one body; he the head, and they the members; and the interest of the one is the interest of the other.

And this living fellowship hath the blessed Saviour with all his people. He hath left the society of others and become one of themselves, and joined himself to them and them to him as one body, bearing the same burdens of their life, necessities, and exposure, and giving himself forever to their good and peace. Like another and more glorious David, he stands out against the bear and the lion that his flock may live; and puts his life in the stead of theirs. He imperils himself in their sight, and persists in the struggle even unto death, that they may see and know how truly their interests are assumed by him, and then returns to them after his victory to reassure them how all his soul and strength are given for their security and blessedness, and how safe they are in his gracious keeping. And when from the yonder bank of the river of death, bright with immortal day and unfading flowers, he looks back upon those who had fled from him in his hour of trial, it is in no words of estrangement, but in the true spirit of the shepherd's everlasting oneness with his flock that he says: "Say unto my brethren that I ascend to my

Father and to your Father, to my God and your God." John 20 : 17.

But this title of Good Shepherd is equally significant of most blessed offices. A good shepherd is the guide of his flock. He knows his sheep. He understands their character, their wants, their dangers. He is entirely acquainted with the inmost nature of each individual of them, and how they need to be dealt with. He even calleth them by name, and chooses for them the directions in which they are to move, the paths they are to follow, the places in which they may roam by day, and the folds in which they are to rest at night. When he would conduct them from one scene to another, he goeth before them, and calls to them, that they may follow.

And so is Christ the Guide of his people. He is thoroughly acquainted with every one of them, and selects all their changes for them. Even as the Father knows him, and as he knows the Father, so he knows his people; and his every movement and word is meant to influence them toward their highest security and blessedness. In all the varied paths and perilous places of human life, "he goeth before them." Having looked out the good pasture, he takes the lead to bring us to it; or espying danger, he directs the way to avoid it. His word often calls in directions which we do not expect, in ways that are very bewildering, over rocky paths, through thorny thickets, by dark and threatening ravines; but he knows exactly whither he would take us, and what we can en-

dure; and is simply doing the work of the Good Shepherd to bring us where we may lie down in green pastures, and rest beside the still waters.

The good shepherd careth for the sheep. His heart is drawn out toward them. And all his dealings with regard to them are conditioned by an undying affection for them. If any are fearful, or weak, or in necessity, his eye notices it, and his sympathy is enlisted, and the needed help is afforded. I have myself seen with what tender solicitude the Arab shepherd bound up the injured limb of some suffering member of his flock; and how gently he took up the yet feeble lambs in his arms to carry them over the rough places, and up the difficult steeps, and across the rapid waters; and how kindly he helped such as were laboring with their burdens; and how he lay all night at the mouth of the cave where he had folded his precious charge, that they might rest undisturbed till the morning dawned. And so the blessed Saviour cares for us, and serves us, both in the light and in the darkness.

A good shepherd is also the faithful defender of his flock. A mere hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and who knows nothing of the true spirit of his office, when he seeth the wolf coming, leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and suffereth the flock to be mutilated, and the sheep to be scattered. He is not willing to assume risks, or encounter dangers for the sake of the sheep. But "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." He stands by them in every peril, and defends

them to the last extremity. And so Christ has loved his people, even to die for them. Nor have they a foe against which he is not armed, or from which he is not ready to defend them. No man shall pluck them out of his hand. All the resources of his almightiness stand pledged for their security. The eternal majesty of his Godhead must be vanquished and destroyed before even the feeblest of them can be touched, or have so much as a hair harmed. A Shepherd is he of the true blood, and of a more than Davidic chivalry; a good, genuine, true-born Shepherd, who would sooner suffer the extinction of his own existence than that his sheep should fall a prey to the destroyer. "Fear not, little flock," is his gracious word to his people. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Is. 41 : 10.

So much for the first aspect of the subject. Let us look now at the second.

As Christ is a Shepherd, so his people are sheep. Those who are his charge and care are described as "the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." Ps. 95 : 7.

This reminds us of our exposed and lost estate without Christ. A sheep is an ignorant and defenceless creature by nature. It is quite incapable of self-government, and perishes without some one to look after it, and to provide for it. And it has many enemies, much more powerful than itself,

against which it is in no way armed or defended. It must have a keeper. We cannot be happy as our own masters. The sins and errors of the past, the bewildering difficulties of the tangled present, and the frowning darkness of the terrible future, are all alike full of sources of distress and bodings of unavoidable ill, if left to ourselves. The soul in its absence from the fold of Christ, whatever its momentary thoughtlessness and gayety, yearns and seeks about for some one to stand between it and danger, between it and disturbing uncertainty, between it and guilt. Hence the disposition of people of all classes and ages to group themselves around great geniuses, teachers, kings, conquerors, reformers, heroes, and to welcome to their hearts any show of ability to be intrusted with the keeping of what they cannot, with any idea of security, retain in their own hands. Hence the credulous giving of consciences to others to keep, the surrender of the judgment to the most absurd teachings of such as claim to guide it right, and the setting up of guides who are treated as infallible. And yet, as often as men have betaken themselves to mere earthly leaders and human lights, the deeper has been their bewilderment, and the more certain has been their disappointment and ruin. It was in this helpless and lost condition that Christ found the race. "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Matt. 9 : 36.

But Christ's flock is no longer thus straying and

fainting in the wilds of nature. They have been gathered out of the erring world, and have become a people to themselves. Once lost in the waste howling wilderness, the Lord went out seeking them until he found them. By the mouth of the prophet, he said of old, "I will seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places whither they be scattered; and I will bring them out from the people, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." Having bought them with his blood, and come to them by his word and sacraments, and graciously proposed himself to them as their true Shepherd, and drawn them by his loving ways and Spirit, they have learned to know him, to confide in his wisdom and goodness, and to separate themselves from all the rest of the world, to be one with him as their ever blessed Lord and Master.

The word is that they know him. "I am known of mine." They have not only been taught who he is, but they have personal acquaintance with him. They know him by their own experiences of his goodness. They have come to a sort of intuitive capacity to recognize him. His voice, his Spirit, his will, and his whole method, are as familiar to them, and are as readily distinguished by them, as their own thoughts. In whatever aspect he may present himself, they know that it is he. And whether in view, or for the time out of sight, they are satisfied that he is their true Shepherd, and that all his movements are for their good. Let

men slander him as they will, or bring what false reports concerning him they may, his sheep know him, that he is everything that they can require, and that he is above all shepherds, "*The Good Shepherd.*"

There is such a thing as knowing of Christ, and having very complete intellectual information concerning his person and work, and still being a stranger to him. Religion is a thing of the soul and affections more than the intellect. Right knowledge of Jesus is from the Holy Ghost moving the heart, not by the apparatus of cold philosophy, but by the still small voice which mixes itself with the inmost feelings. It is not found in systematic formulas, or dogmatic structures of Gospel truths, which, however valuable, complete, and beautiful, are often as dead as the little houses which the child builds with its blocks. What we need is not the arrangement of these truths in piles for our admiration, but to have their spirit infused into our souls and lives, and translated into the living pulsations of our hearts. And in this many of the humblest and least scientific are often more successful than our learned divines. They know the truth by being true. They may not understand the Shepherd's conversations, nor be able to blow the Shepherd's reed, but, as his sheep, they know him as their Shepherd. They know that they are his, and that they are safe in him. Like babes amid the mystery and confusion of a modern mill, they may be unable to comprehend the complicated operations going on around

them, and not have so much as an idea of wonder at the machinery by which those operations are carried on; but they can still distinguish the tones of Fatherhood, and tenderness, and love in the voice which addresses them, and have confidence in them, and receive consolation through them, and feel that they are safe in the gracious keeping of their blessed Lord and Redeemer. And thus, with the feelings of the soul assured, they have a deeper and more satisfactory knowledge than any framework of argument and intellect can give.

Still further, they hear his voice. This was not true of the most of those to whom Christ first addressed himself. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1 : 11. Haughty Pharisees and learned Scribes, too wise in their own conceit to take in the logic of the heart, demanded by what authority he did these things, and called for signs from heaven to prove to them that the truth was true. The poor unlettered fishermen at the first word felt a chord touched in their souls, and responded with loving confidence and obedience, and confessed by the revealing Spirit within that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God; but the more favored "children of the kingdom" would none of him. They did not know him, and would not hear his voice. They even made war with him, and persecuted him unto death. Therefore he turned his back upon that fold, and talked of "other sheep," which yet lay scattered among the nations, or wandering in the dark wilderness of heathenism. Them he

must bring. If the heads of the ancient fold refused him, these should hear his voice. And they have heard it, and been hearing it in all these ages since.

The voice of Jesus is his preached Gospel. The hearing of that voice is not the mere hearing of the outward ear, but a hearing with the heart and soul and life, as the knowing of him is of the heart. As the sheep know their shepherd, they know his call, and obey it. More than once have I seen great flocks strung along the hillsides of the sacred land, and seemingly indifferent to everything that was passing. But the moment the shepherd gave his call to lead them down at evening to where they were to be folded for the night, instantly they lifted up their heads, left off their grazing among the rocks, and started after their leader. The same in the morning, though several flocks belonging to different shepherds were together in the same shelter during the night, the shepherd of one had only to give his call, and all the sheep belonging to him at once separated themselves from the rest, and took after him. They heard his voice. They understood what he meant. And they confidingly obeyed. Even so, Christ's sheep hear his voice, and follow him.

And yet, again, Christ's sheep are all one. They are gathered from different quarters. Some are from the ancient Jewish fold. In all the Christian ages, believers of the blood of Abraham have been found witnessing for Jesus. But other sheep he has which have sprung from other races. The

Gentiles, more than all, have given their multitudes to serve the living and true God, and to trust in his Son Jesus Christ. Yet, of whatever national blood, from whatever region brought, or under whatever social economy reared, they are all one in Christ Jesus, one fold with one Shepherd. They may not know each other here. They may be ignorant of each other's language or existence. Some may be high up on the summits, and some may be down among the valleys. Hills, mountains, rivers, seas may be between them. A stranger might think they belonged to very different owners. But they all know Christ, and are known of him, and hear his voice, and so are all joined together as one flock, members of the same fold, and having the one only Shepherd. Outward differences may be many. Accidental elements of diversity may separate them widely. But inwardly looking to him as their Shepherd, and experimentally and in heart made acquainted with his saving goodness, they are still but one body, with the same common Head, and united in one common fellowship of life and salvation.

And yet, with all the beauty, tenderness, and bliss which attaches to their present union with Jesus, it is but a dim and imperfect picture of what awaits this flock in heaven. They are all safe and blessed now; but the further word of Jesus is, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand." John 10 : 28

Though in the paths of death they tread,
With gloomy horrors overspread,
Their steadfast hearts shall fear no ill,
For he, their Lord, is with them still:
His friendly crook shall give them aid,
And guide them through the dreadful shade.

Having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they shall come out of all their tribulations, and take their places before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living water springs: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Rev. 7: 14–17. Blessed flock! to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.

Are you, then, a member of this fold? Have you learned by happy experience to know Jesus? Outwardly you have often heard his voice; has your heart from within resounded in willing obedience? To-day his merciful invitation comes to you again. It is the Good Shepherd himself that calls to you. Can you distinguish his voice? And will you not respond to it as one of those "other sheep" which he has given it as his work and joy to bring to the blessed fold?

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